

**NEW**

THE BRUTAL CLASHES THAT FORGED EMPIRES AND TOPPLED TITANS

# ANCIENT BATTLES

**INSIDE**  
Discover the  
secrets of the  
Assyrian war  
machine

FROM THE MAKERS OF  
**HISTORY  
WAR**

**Digital  
Edition**

FUTURE

FIRST  
EDITION

MARATHON ✕ ALESIA ✕ RED CLIFFS ✕ CANNAE ✕ CHÂLONS







# TO WAR!

**T**he right to rule is never given - it is taken. For as long as humans have walked upright they have fought among themselves for resources, land, and the ability to dominate others. At first fashioning crude weapons and forming into roaming bands, in time people built armies, which in turn made the prospect of territorial expansion a brutal possibility. As a result, history is littered with the carnage of colossal battles and vicious raids, many of which played a defining role in the rise and fall of kings and empires. From the early clashes of the Stone Age to brutal engagements such as Gaugamela, Zama, and Walaja, steel yourself for a journey through troubled lands, rising powers, and body-strewn seas as we plunge head-first into the greatest battles of the ancient world.





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ANCIENT BATTLES

# FIRST BLOOD

DISCOVER THE EVIDENCE OF FIGHTING BEFORE  
THE INVENTION OF WRITING



Written by Mark Dolan



Flint arrowheads on display at the Museum of Prehistory and Archeology in Santander, Spain



A collection of Bronze Age weapons found in Germany, similar to those used at Tollense



Conflict is almost as innate to humans as the need for community and therefore has a deep history. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to identify evidence of conflict and warfare in the archaeological record. Any tool or weapon that could be used for hunting animals could also be used to harm humans. Identifying the earliest warfare is subsequently tricky, but in a small number of cases there is convincing evidence of people fighting with one another long before they began writing any of it down.

Due to the patchiness of the archaeological record, the glimpses of warfare that we can see span thousands of years, ranging from the end of the Late Palaeolithic, around 20-13,000 years ago, to the Later Bronze Age some 12,000 years later. The time difference between these examples is more than three times as long as the time since Stonehenge was built. As a (very) quick whistle-stop tour of over 10,000 years of prehistoric conflict, we can pick out four fascinating cases where archaeologists have identified strong evidence of violent conflict.

## JEBEL SAHABA

The site of Jebel Sahaba, located in the Nile Valley on the border between Egypt and Sudan, is an early cemetery where at least 61 people were buried around 13,000 years ago. Many of the skeletal remains show signs of injury caused by projectiles (i.e. flint arrowheads), and such objects have been found in and among the remains. Some of the remains even survive with flint arrowheads still embedded in the wounds.

It was previously thought that the Jebel Sahaba cemetery comprised the burial of the fallen from a single battle, but recent analysis of the remains from the site suggests that the people buried here were killed in smaller, repeated ambushes or attacks by nearby groups.

## NATARUK, LAKE TURKANA

Although the burials at Jebel Sahaba were people who had been killed in unilateral attacks on a group and buried by their own community,

the 27 individuals discovered at the site of Nataruk near Lake Turkana in modern Kenya represent a small group of foragers who were intentionally killed in a single event around 10,500-9,500 years ago.

There was no structure to the style of burial of the 27 individuals, nor a discernible burial pit, so the victims may have been simply left where they fell. Analysis of the remains discovered shows that five or six people suffered sharp-force trauma to the head, probably from arrows, and five suffered blunt-force trauma. It is thought that the attack may have been motivated by a raid for resources, as the presence of early pottery indicates some storage in the otherwise hunter-gatherer societies.

## SAN JUAN ANTE PORTAM LATINAM

Skipping forwards about 6,000 years, we can turn our attention to the Late Neolithic site of San Juan ante Portam Latinam in Spain. A rock shelter in the River Ebro valley, it was discovered accidentally in 1985 during construction works, and excavations in the early 1990s uncovered a burial site containing a minimum of 338 people, 23 per cent of whom had evidence of having suffered traumatic injury.

Among the remains were dozens of examples of cranial trauma as well as injuries consistent with arrow punctures, but interestingly there were also a significant number of healed cranial injuries, suggesting that some of the group's warriors may have sustained injuries in war, been nursed back to health, and continued to fight in later battles. There were even four instances of trepanning - making a puncture in the skull, one of the oldest attested forms of surgery - with three of the patients recovering from the operation.

## TOLLENSE

Perhaps the best-attested single prehistoric battle comes from the Bronze Age site of the Tollense Valley in northeastern Germany. In the 13th century BCE, two groups of warriors clashed in



A reconstruction of some of the burials from Tollense

a violent battle in the valley, with at least 150 people killed. DNA analysis has shown that all the known participants in the battle were from central and Northern Europe, though strontium analysis shows that some of the individuals involved had non-local origins.

The fascinating aspect of this conflict is the discovery of over 300 metal weapons in and around the river, allowing archaeologists to see both the weapons and the damage they were able to do. Weapons used included wooden clubs, flint and bronze arrowheads, and bronze knives, spears, and swords, including one bronze arrowhead still embedded in a skull.

Although the evidence of prehistoric warfare is few and far between, there is enough to show that throughout human history there has been violence and conflict. Whether small-scale raids for food and other resources, bloody battles over land and territory, or individual clashes between two warriors, war is a fundamental part of life, and it has been as long as humans have lived near one another.





# BATTLE OF THE GRANICUS

**ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S FIRST TEST IN THE PERSIAN EMPIRE WOULD SET THE PATTERN FOR HIS CONQUEST. VASTLY OUTNUMBERED, COULD HE LEAD HIS ARMY TO VICTORY?**



Written by Murray Dahm

A highly a-historical but fantastically detailed 17th-century imagining of the Battle of the Granicus, by French artist Charles Le Brun





In the spring of 334 BCE, Alexander III, the 22-year-old king of Macedonia (reigned 336–323 BCE), invaded the vast Achaemenid Persian Empire with a small yet elite army of some 30,000–43,000 veteran infantry and 5,000 cavalry. This invasion was the culmination of almost a century of pressure for a Greek commander to punish Persia for its own invasion of Greece during the 5th century BCE. Persia had also continued to seriously meddle in Greek affairs, affecting the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404 BCE and the outcome of the Corinthian War through the King's Peace in 387 BCE. The mantle of leadership for this proposed invasion had passed from the Spartan king, Agesilaus II, to other Greek statesmen and then to the Macedonian king, Philip II, who had all but conquered Greece in 338 BCE at

the Battle of Chaeronea. Philip had probably already begun plans for just such an invasion, but when he was assassinated in 336 BCE, the responsibility for (and willingness to undertake) the invasion passed to his son, Alexander. Alexander had commanded his father's cavalry at Chaeronea so was already a veteran at 18. He was not yet 'the Great', but his conduct during the invasion more than earned him the title, and kings and commanders ever since have sought to emulate him.

With his relatively small force, Alexander intended to conquer the immense Persian Empire. According to our sources, the Persians could muster more than a million men against Alexander's tiny force. Most modern authors are highly sceptical about such numbers, but there is little doubt Alexander was vastly outnumbered and marching

entirely in enemy territory. His first test would occur on the banks of the River Granicus, known today as the Biga Çayı in Çanakkale Province, northwestern Turkey, a river that flows roughly north-south into the Black Sea. This river is the most likely location, although there are other candidates, too, such as the Dimetoka, a tributary of the Biga Çayı.

Alexander crossed the Hellespont into Persia in the spring of 334 BCE with an army of veterans rather than young, inexperienced men. They had all campaigned in Greece and further afield under Alexander's father and had fought in Thrace and Greece under Alexander, who had spent the previous two years ensuring that Greece and Thrace were pliant and loyal and would not contemplate rebellion while he was away.



### OPPOSING FORCES

#### MACEDONIANS

**LEADERS**  
Alexander III,  
Parmenion, Socrates,  
Perdiccas, Coenus,  
Amyntas, Philip,  
Melager, Craterus

**INFANTRY**  
30,000–43,000

**CAVALRY**  
5,000

**ARCHERS**  
1,000

#### PERSIANS

**LEADERS**  
Aristes, Arsames,  
Spithridates,  
Rheomithres,  
Memnon of Rhodes

**INFANTRY**  
20,000–600,000  
(100,000 likely)

**CAVALRY**  
10,000–20,000

**ARCHERS**  
All infantry





## BATTLE OF THE GRANICUS

334 B.C.

Macedonian ■  
Achaemenid Empire ■

LAKE

**1 MACEDONIAN FORCES**

The Macedonian army crosses the Granicus early in the day before the Persians can fully deploy. The Macedonians draw up their line (right to left): the Companion Cavalry (A); archers and Agrianian javelin-men (B); the lancer cavalry (sarissophoroi because they were armed with sarissae) and Paeonian cavalry (C); Socrates' squadron of Companion cavalry (D); the hypaspists (E); the six phalanx taxeis of Perdiccas (F), Coenus (G), Amyntas, son of Andromenes (H), Philip (I), Meleager (J) and Craterus (K); Thracian peltasts (L); Allied cavalry (M); and, on the extreme left wing, the Thessalian cavalry under Parmenion (N).

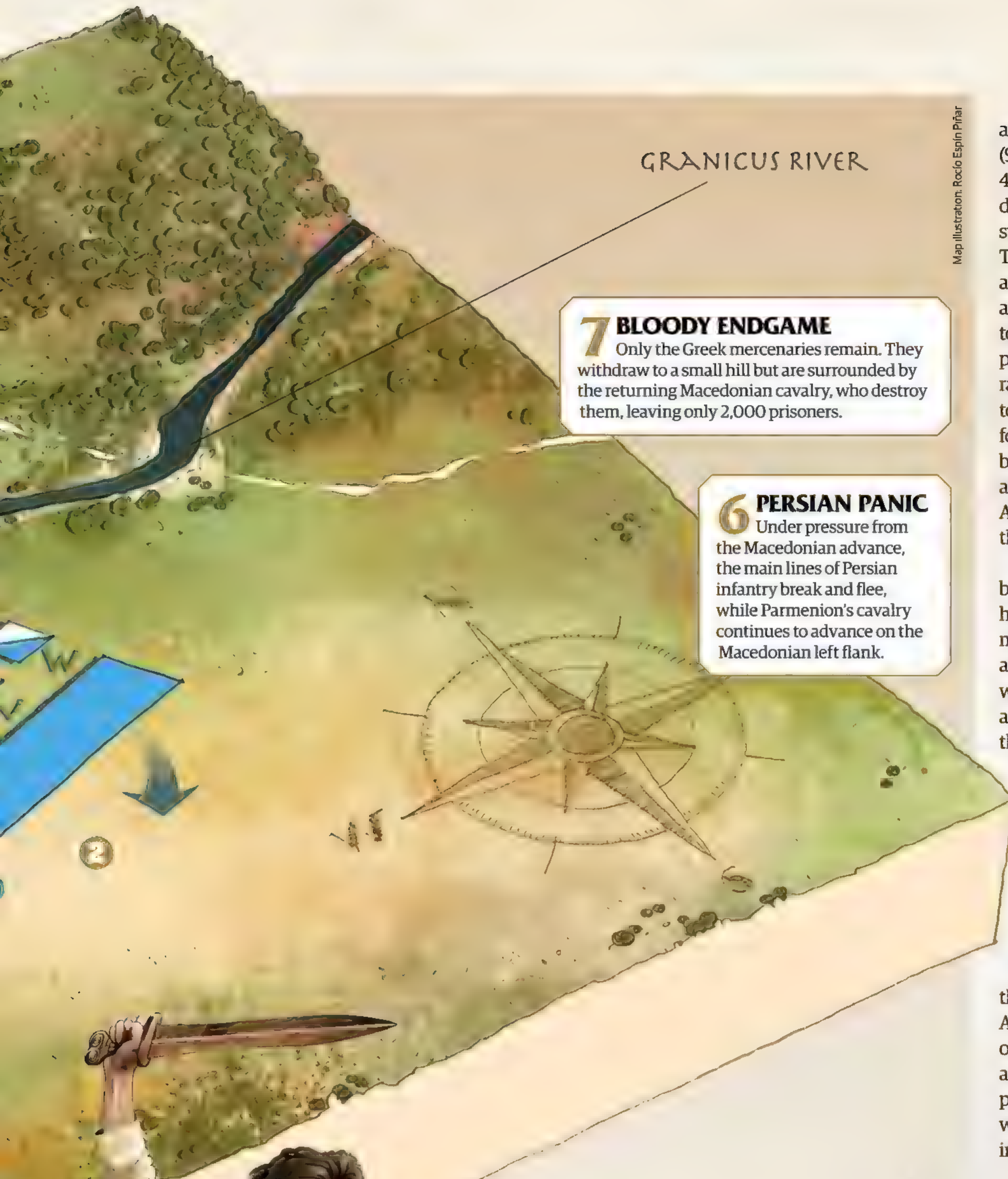
**2 PERSIAN FORCES**

Opposite them, the Persians draw up their 10,000 cavalry in front of their infantry (O), who number approximately 100,000 men and among whom are the 20,000 Greek mercenaries. The Persian cavalry are drawn up (left to right): Memnon of Rhodes (P), 1,000; Arsames (Q), 1,000; Arsites with 1,000 Paphlagonians (R); Spithridates, with 1,000 Hyrcanians (S); 1,000 cavalry from other nations (T); 2,000 Bactrians (U); 2,000 cavalry under Rheomithres (V); and 1,000 Median cavalry (W).

**3 BATTLE COMMENCES**

Alexander orders Amyntas, son of Arrhabaeus, forward with Socrates' squadron of Companion cavalry, the Paeonian cavalry and one division of infantry (that of Perdiccas) before leading the remaining right-wing cavalry in an oblique charge. This charge is met by volleys of Persian missiles. Meanwhile, the troops on the Persian right wing charge into Parmenion's cavalry on the Macedonian left.





Map illustration: Rocio Espin Piñar

## 7 BLOODY ENDGAME

Only the Greek mercenaries remain. They withdraw to a small hill but are surrounded by the returning Macedonian cavalry, who destroy them, leaving only 2,000 prisoners.

## 6 PERSIAN PANIC

Under pressure from the Macedonian advance, the main lines of Persian infantry break and flee, while Parmenion's cavalry continues to advance on the Macedonian left flank.

Macedonian phalangites made up the core of his army, organised into six divisions of 1,536 men (9,216 men in total) armed with a long sarissa spear 4.5 to seven metres (15 to 23 feet) long (our sources disagree on their exact length and no example has survived). These had a long blade and a butt-spike. The men also wore armour and carried shields and swords. They would line up 16 ranks deep and advance, presenting thousands of deadly blades towards the enemy. The front five ranks' spear tips protruded beyond the front rank; the others were raised, ready, and perhaps offered some disruption to the missiles of their enemies. This well-drilled formation provided flexibility; in addition to being a potent attacking threat, the phalanx could also become an immovable anvil against which Alexander could strike with his cavalry forces as the hammer, the enemy trapped in between.

This finely tuned phalanx system was bolstered by a combination of other units such as the hypaspists (guard infantry), Alexander's own mercenary Greek hoplites, and specialised lightly armed troops (Agrianian and Thracian peltasts who were mostly armed with javelins, Cretan archers, and others). These units helped to protect the vulnerable flanks of the phalanx. In total,

Alexander had only 30,000–43,000 men at his command (again, different sources give different numbers). Leading the elite cavalry arm made up of Macedonia's young nobles, the 1,800 Companions, was Alexander himself. In addition, he had cavalry contingents from Thessaly and other parts of Greece amounting to a further 3,200 men.

Alexander's arrival was, however, no surprise to the Persian governors (satraps) of western Anatolia. Alexander's father, Philip, had made his intention of invading Persia plain, and soon after Philip's assassination in 336 BCE, Alexander set about putting his father's plans into action. The satraps wasted no time in preparing to meet Alexander in battle once he and his army had crossed the

Left: Alexander began his conquest eastwards with the Battle of the Granicus

Right: A vast number of Persian infantry faced off against the Greek-Macedonian army

## 5 INFANTRY ENGAGES

The Macedonian phalanx advances obliquely and the phalangites engage with the larger body of Persian infantry, who have advanced to intermingle with their cavalry but who can only engage with the units on the Macedonian right.

## 4 PERSIAN CAVALRY WITHDRAWS

The Persians meet Alexander's charge with volleys of missile fire (both javelins and arrows). Only through sheer determination is Alexander able to push his charge through. The Macedonian cavalry then engage the Persian cavalry and force them to withdraw.







Hellespont. They summoned their levies and met for a council of war at the city of Zeleia (near modern Sanköy in Turkey). We are given the names of 14 commanders among the Persians, ranging from the satraps immediately affected or threatened to wealthy Persian landowners, as well as the Greek mercenary commander Memnon of Rhodes. Alexander moved quickly and headed towards the Persian mustering point.

According to the historian Arrian (usually regarded as our best surviving source for Alexander), Memnon counselled his employers to avoid facing the new Macedonian king in open battle because his army included a greater force of infantry. This probably meant heavy infantry, because the Persians certainly had many more infantry, but they were lightly armoured and predominately used the bow and (shorter) spear. The nobility provided the cavalry, and the Persians also employed Greek mercenary hoplites. They may also have had men of their own trained as hoplites (the cardaces). Memnon advocated the employment of a scorched-earth policy ahead of Alexander's troops, burning crops to deny the invaders' supplies. Memnon's advice was ignored, however, and the Persian commanders sided with Arsites, satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia, in whose territory Alexander's force was present.

Alexander was marching along the northern coast of Anatolia and advancing towards the Granicus River. Arrian tells us that the Persian army was made up of 20,000 cavalry and almost the same number of foreign mercenaries, although others give them between 100,000 and 600,000 infantry too. The Persians advanced from Zeleia and

### “ALEXANDER LED FROM THE FRONT AND WAS INORDINATELY BRAVE”

took up a defensive position on the far side of the Granicus as Alexander approached the river.

Reconstructing the Battle of the Granicus is complicated by the fact that the surviving narratives (Arrian and the historian Diodorus Siculus especially) offer very different versions of the battle. Although he is often derided as the least trustworthy of our sources on Alexander, Diodorus' account of the battle actually makes the most sense. What follows therefore combines Diodorus' account with those of Arrian and our other sources, such as the biographer Plutarch.

In the accounts of both Arrian and Plutarch, Alexander began the Battle of the Granicus rashly, charging across the river at the Persians either without support or despite being massively outnumbered (leading his 1,800 Companions against the Persian cavalry of 10,000–20,000 men). According to Arrian, Alexander's general, Parmenion, argued it was too late in the day to begin a battle and advised that they should make camp and attack in the morning. In Arrian's version, Alexander ignored this advice and immediately launched his attack. In his account of the battle, Plutarch argues that Alexander's attack was even more rash. There is no mention of a vanguard (as

there is in Arrian), only Alexander charging into the river (with his Companions) and persisting until he had forced a crossing.

In each of these scenarios, Alexander was throwing away the strengths and meticulous drill of his army – something honed over the previous five years and more. As such, this picture is extremely unlikely and, rather, a more romantic and dashing (if entirely reckless and impetuous) image of the young king. Both Plutarch and Arrian were using the account of Aristobulus as a source, and this may explain the emphasis in their accounts. Aristobulus accompanied Alexander on campaign, although he is never mentioned as a commander or participant in any battles.

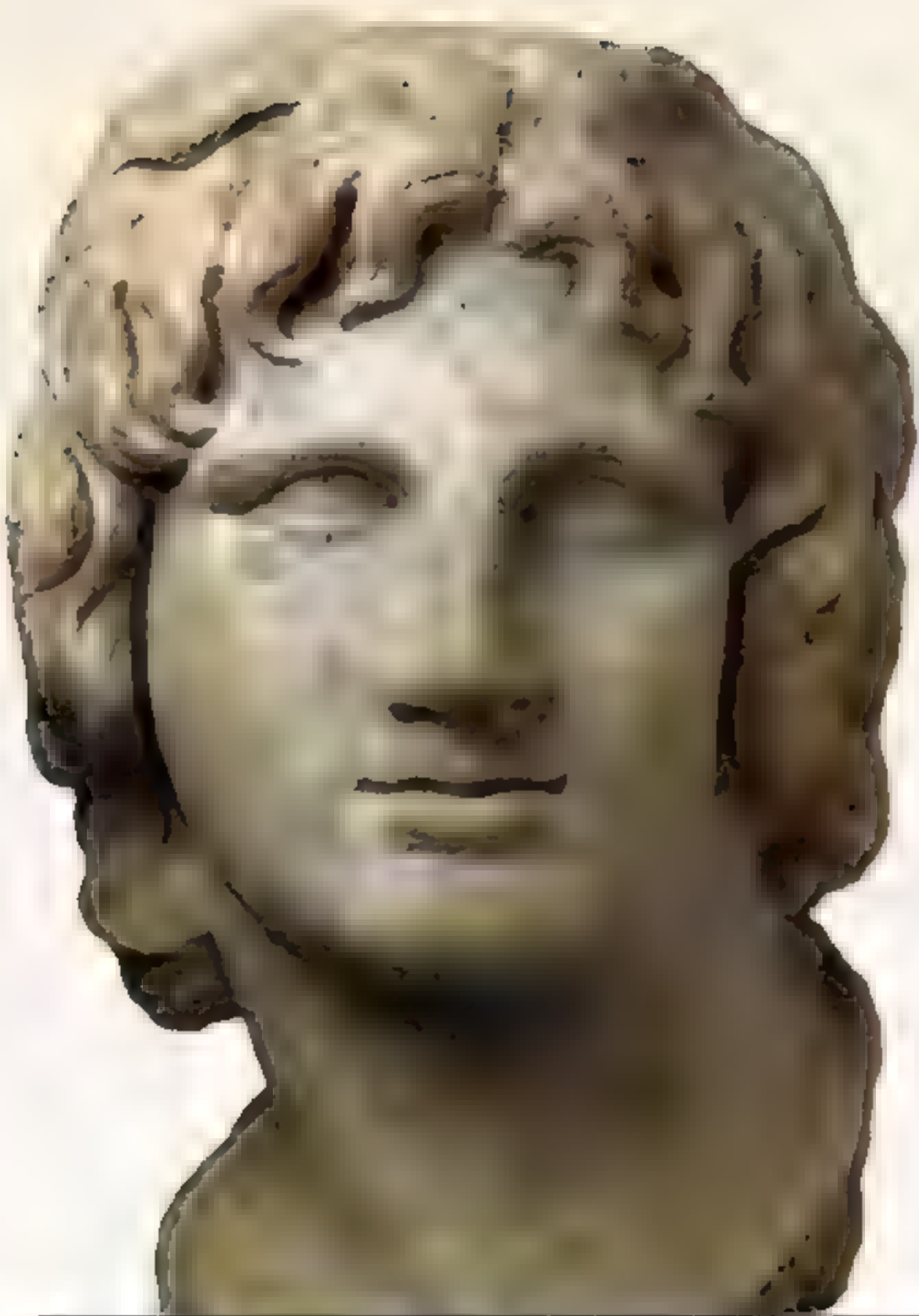
While it is true that in all his battles Alexander placed himself in danger and was at the forefront of the Macedonian forces, his charges were not reckless or impetuous. They were considered and well-planned to create and then exploit a weakness or gap in the Persian line. What is more, they were part of a known battle plan. The other components all had a part to play in that battle plan and they knew it – the account of the battle in Plutarch and Arrian would have Alexander throw all that away. Alexander's entire invasion would have come to an end had he fallen at the Granicus. Of course, that was always going to be a risk when the Macedonian king ran with his style of leadership in leading cavalry charges from the front, but it is an aspect of his behaviour that is perhaps overemphasised by both Arrian and Plutarch.

Alexander did indeed lead from the front and was inordinately brave, but the solid reliability of the Macedonian military machine was built on

Another a-historical  
depiction of the battle, by  
Dutch artist Cornelis Troost







Alexander came to the throne of Macedon in 336 BCE and immediately made preparations to continue his father's plans to invade the Persian Empire



The Alexander Sarcophagus (now in Istanbul) shows Macedonian cavalry and Persian cavalry in combat, intermingled with infantry - just like at Granicus



The better armour and helmets of the Macedonians made them less susceptible to injuries than their Persian counterparts

the dependability of the phalanx in both attack and defence. Alexander is highly unlikely to have engaged in a battle at the Granicus, his first against the Persians, where those aspects of the phalanx, its known strengths, were not to be used because the phalangites' formation was necessarily disrupted or not brought to bear.

That leaves us with Diodorus' account. In contrast to Arrian and Plutarch, Diodorus offers much that is different but represents a more cohesive story of the battle. It is also worth remembering that he was writing some 200 years before both Arrian and Plutarch so his may be a better picture - although he was still writing almost 300 years after the events he describes.

Diodorus' account of the battle is also the longest that survives and bolsters the case for more attention being shown to his version of events. According to Diodorus, when Alexander reached the Granicus, the Persians were deployed on the high ground on the opposite bank. There is no reference to the advice of Parmenion or the other objections to battle; Diodorus simply states that Alexander and his forces crossed the river at dawn, before the Persians could challenge the advance. Alexander must, therefore, have camped for the night - just as Parmenion in Arrian's account suggested he should.

Arrian and Plutarch's accounts have the battle taking place late in the day, Diodorus' at dawn.

Diodorus states that the Persians deployed their cavalry in front of the Macedonian infantry, and we are given a detailed deployment of the Persian cavalry left to right and then the Macedonian. These deployments have been depicted on the accompanying map (pages 10-11). According to Diodorus, the Persian infantry (as in Arrian) were posted behind the cavalry and did not advance, the 10,000 cavalry being deemed sufficient to defeat Alexander's forces. The fact that the Persians deployed their cavalry in front tells us that they had not faced a phalanx or been told of its strengths, one which was designed to deal with enemy cavalry, especially if they attacked head-on. In Plutarch, the Persian



A relief of Persian infantry from Persepolis. Their comparative lack of armour and protection is obvious, in part explaining the disproportionate casualty figures they suffered





## ANCIENT BATTLES



The different headgear on depictions of Persian infantry are usually taken to represent the different races of the empire. Here are Medes (rounded headgear) and Persians (pleated)

infantry were intermingled with the cavalry along the riverbank.

There are, nonetheless, aspects of Arrian's and Plutarch's accounts that can be used in conjunction with Diodorus'. Diodorus, for instance, does not include the vanguard attack mentioned in Arrian. In fact, if we use Arrian's details but place them in a battle fought the following morning, when Diodorus places it, many of the problems are mitigated. According to Arrian, the first to enter the river were the *prodromoi* (horse guards) and the Paeonians, commanded by Amyntas, along with one division of infantry and Socrates' squadron of Companion cavalry commanded by Ptolemy, son of Philip. Amyntas' and Socrates' attack was conducted by cavalry supported by 1,500 infantry - either the hypaspists or the rightmost division of the phalanx (that of Perdiccas). Alexander then led his right wing of cavalry across the river. The Persians were waiting across the river, their cavalry in front, and Alexander's predominantly cavalry force immediately came under sustained missile fire from the Persian cavalry stationed on the far bank, much of it in the form of javelins. According to Arrian, the entire Macedonian line advanced across the river obliquely from the right. This took place while the initial Macedonian cavalry attack was engaged with the Persian cavalry. By advancing his army in this way, Alexander ensured that his troops offered enough of a threat to the Persians on the opposite riverbank that they could not all move to attack Alexander's cavalry as he emerged from the river, lest they leave the path open for the remaining Macedonian forces to cross or come under attack themselves from the unengaged Macedonian troops.

Alexander's cavalry sought to push their way out of the river, but the Persian cavalry attempted to push them back and keep them in the water. The men of the Macedonian vanguard came off worst in their initial encounter and fell back on Alexander as he advanced. Alexander, therefore, led the Macedonian right wing combined with





these remnants of the vanguard attack and charged directly towards the Persian commanders. Alexander's men, using cornel-wood lances (called the *xyston*) against the short javelins of the Persians, were eventually able to push the Persians back from the riverbank.

The Persian cavalry were also forced back by the Macedonian cavalry, who had by now been joined by lightly armed troops (the Agrianians and peltasts). In Arrian's account, the Persian cavalry broke and fled, and Alexander then turned his attention towards the mercenary infantry, numbering almost 20,000, who stood firm where they had first been drawn up.

According to Diodorus, Alexander's attack was against fewer cavalry. Alexander brought his phalanx and cavalry down on them, massacring all except 2,000, who were taken prisoner. These prisoners included a body of Athenians kept captive in a bid to keep Athens' allegiance.

In Plutarch, having crossed the river, the Macedonian phalanx engaged the Persian infantry forces, who soon fled the battlefield, but the Greek mercenaries stood their ground and accounted for most of the losses suffered by the Macedonian phalanx. The desperate mercenaries asked for quarter, but this was refused. In Arrian, the Macedonian phalanx was only brought against the Greek mercenaries; the rest of the Persian cavalry had already fled. Arrian's account would mean most of Alexander's phalanx was squandered, unable to attack and therefore the battle (as described) was mainly a cavalry one. Diodorus tells us that with the Persian cavalry commanders slain, the Persian cavalry fled the scene, leaving the opposing infantry forces to do battle. The Persian infantry, deeply affected by the rout of their cavalry counterparts, soon fled likewise.

Another reason to favour the account of Diodorus is that his seems to better explain the incredibly low casualty numbers recorded. Even Plutarch and Arrian record these, but their accounts of the battle would make higher casualties seem far

## “THE PERSIANS WERE FORCED BACK BY THE MACEDONIAN CAVALRY, WHO HAD BEEN JOINED BY LIGHTLY ARMED TROOPS”

more likely. Arrian tells us that the Macedonians lost 25 Companion cavalry in the first charge and 60 more cavalry and approximately 30 infantry later. Plutarch quotes Aristobulus as saying there were only 34 Macedonian dead, nine of whom were infantrymen (the remaining 25 accords with Arrian's number of the Companions who fell). Justin, another source who is sometimes useful, tells us that only nine infantry and 120 cavalry fell on the Macedonian side; his numbers agree partially with the other sources. Diodorus does not specify the Macedonian casualty numbers.

It is hard to reconcile the low Macedonian casualty numbers recorded by Arrian and Plutarch with the ferocity of the hail of missiles into which both authors have Alexander charge. By contrast, Persian casualties across all sources are noted as having been very high. Arrian records that 1,000 Persian cavalry and almost 18,000 infantry perished (2,000 infantry taken prisoner). Plutarch reports 2,500 cavalry and 20,000 infantry killed.

Plutarch has more infantry casualties almost than Arrian has infantry present at the battle. Diodorus records 2,000 Persian cavalry and 10,000 infantry dead, along with 20,000 prisoners. The low numbers of Macedonian casualties do not accord with the hard fighting mentioned by Arrian and Plutarch, but they do seem to fit with Diodorus' account of Alexander crossing the Granicus at dawn before the Persians could deploy and fighting the battle on the Persian side of the river. Diodorus' relatively low figure of 10,000 Persian infantry casualties does, however, make sense if the Persian infantry fled soon after being engaged by the Macedonians. The numbers of Persian casualties in all Alexander's battles are always unbelievably high, no doubt to awe readers with Alexander's overwhelming victories.

At the Battle of the Granicus, the way Arrian and Plutarch describe it, Alexander was abandoning nearly all that was proven to work in the Macedonian military machine. They have the young king trying to achieve a victory with the hammer of his cavalry alone. That is a highly unlikely scenario. Alexander simply did not have enough cavalry with which to affect such tactics, especially if he was charging a force superior in numbers. His 13 squadrons (Plutarch's figure) would only amount to about 2,500 men (with 200 men per cavalry squadron), yet he was charging 10,000 or 20,000 Persian cavalry.

Alexander only had 4,000–5,000 cavalry in total and even if he was charging only the leftmost Persian units, he was still outnumbered. If we accept Alexander's cavalry charge in Diodorus' account against a force of only 10,000 cavalry, we restore the norms of the proven Macedonian tactics. If this was done with infantry support as described

by Arrian, the norms of Alexander's subsequent battles are shown to have been used at Granicus too. Diodorus states that even though Alexander's personal conduct at the Battle of the Granicus earned him the palm for bravery, the Thessalian cavalry on the Macedonian left wing earned a great reputation for valour.

The scale of the Macedonian victory is made more probable if Alexander's entire army was indeed brought to bear on a numerically superior force. Plutarch does not mention the numbers of Persian infantry but records that 20,000 of them were killed. Arrian mentions that the Persians only had foreign mercenaries and that they numbered slightly less than 20,000. It would seem highly unlikely, however, that the Persians would decide to engage the Macedonians if they were outnumbered in infantry. Even if they were intending to decide the battle in a cavalry engagement, the threat of the Macedonian infantry makes it very unlikely that they would do so when their numbers were only evenly matched.

Plutarch's mingling seems the best solution, especially if the attack was made when they were unprepared. We should reject Arrian's number of less than 20,000 Persian infantry. Likewise, Justin's figure of 600,000 infantry seems too many. Diodorus' 100,000 is within the proportions by which the Persians outnumbered the Macedonians at the later battles of Issus and Gaugamela.

Even if we cannot accept the colossal numbers given, we should be confident that the Persians heavily outnumbered the Macedonians and would no doubt have been confident of victory. Their stunning defeat was a blood-stained portent of things to come. Within a few years, all of Persia would kneel before a new master.



A 17th-century Dutch tapestry showing the Battle of the Granicus





# BATTLE OF JINGXING

**STRATEGIC BRILLIANCE AND AN AUDACIOUS PLAN  
ENSURED VICTORY FOR THE UNDERDOG IN THIS  
LEGENDARY CLASH IN ANCIENT CHINA**



Written by Neil Crowley



**W**hen it comes to assessing the causes of military disasters over the ages, one that appears time and again is the capacity of military leaders to underestimate their enemies. This was the case in October 205 BCE, when the combined forces of the Zhao army took on the much smaller force of the Han army in the rugged Taihang Mountains of northwest China.

The battle was catastrophic for the Zhao army, which was outwitted, outmanoeuvred, and annihilated by a Han force less than one-sixth its size. The general commanding the Han army was Han Xin, a mercurial character who would go on to become the greatest military strategist in Chinese history. Han Xin's strategy that day would

become the stuff of legend. It's a credit to him that over two millennia later the Battle of Jingxing is remembered for the audacious brilliance of his battle plan.

## THE WARRING STATES

The Battle of Jingxing took place towards the end of a period of ancient Chinese history known as the Warring States. This was an era defined by conflict and rife with fractured alliances, scurrilous betrayals, and fervent territorial ambition. Sixteen years prior to the battle, in 221 BCE, the Qin dynasty had been established as the first dynasty of a unified Imperial China. But by 208 BCE, the Qin had been toppled by a rebellion.

In 207 BCE, one of the rebels, a noble called Xiang Yu, asserted his leadership of the rebel armies

China's Taihang Mountains, scene of the Battle of Jingxing between the Han and Zhao armies in 205 BCE





An image depicting the Battle of Wei River, which followed Han Xin's victory at Jingxing

and joined forces with the anti-Qin leader Liu Bang. Xiang Yu and Liu Bang teamed up to overthrow the Qin, but their allegiance was to be short-lived. By 205 BCE, they were at war with each other for control of China.

### THE BATTLE OF PENGCHENG

Liu Bang's military aspirations did not start well. In April of 205 BCE, he suffered a major defeat by Xiang Yu at the Battle of Pengcheng, when 100,000 of his panicked troops were driven into the waters of the Suishi River and massacred. According to *Records of the Grand Historian* by Chinese astrologer and historian Sima Qian, the corpses were so numerous they blocked the river's flow.

To add to Liu Bang's woes, his father and wife had been taken as hostages, and the states of Wei,

Dai, and Zhao defected to Xiang Yu. But Liu Bang had a major asset in his ranks – a soldier called Han Xin who would help transform Liu Bang's fortunes.

A gifted strategist, Han Xin had initially joined Xiang Liang's rebel army and had repeatedly suggested strategies only to be consistently ignored. In 206 BCE, the exasperated Han Xin deserted Xiang Liang and went to join Liu Bang. For a time he fared no better, and within months he was facing execution for violating military law. He only escaped by speaking forthrightly to one of Liu Bang's trusted generals minutes before the axe came down. "I thought the king wanted to rule an empire," implored Han Xin. "Why is he killing valiant men then?"

The general spared his life and recommended him to Liu Bang. Han Xin was eventually promoted

**“THE BATTLE OF JINGXING TOOK PLACE TOWARDS THE END OF A PERIOD OF CHINESE HISTORY KNOWN AS THE WARRING STATES – AN ERA DEFINED BY MILITARY CONFLICT”**



A political map of China during the Warring States period, circa 260 BCE





## ANCIENT BATTLES

to the rank of general, and he immediately set his sights on conquering the kingdoms of northern China. He formulated a strategy to secure the manpower, food, and wealth of northern China for Liu Bang while keeping Xiang Yu distracted in China's Central Plain.

### DEPLETED FORCES

In the summer of 205 BCE, Han Xin and his armies moved north, conquering the states of Wei and Dai. His next objective was the kingdom of Zhao, but his ambitions suffered a blow when Liu Bang ordered that most of Han Xin's elite soldiers be sent south to assist in the Xinyang-Chenggao theatre. Han Xin complied, but despite now leading a depleted and largely untrained army, he refused to abandon the attack on Zhao state.

He proceeded eastward towards the Taihang Mountains, at the end of which lay Jingxing Pass, a point of entry into the Zhao heartland. Meanwhile, the large royal army of Zhao, led by Zhao Xie and Chen Yu, positioned itself at the eastern end of the long, narrow pass ready to defend the Zhao kingdom. The Zhao forces numbered 200,000. Han Xin had just 30,000 men at his disposal.

### THE PATH AHEAD

But Han Xin had luck on his side. One of the

Zhao warlords had advised Chen Yu to block off important routes across the Taihang Mountains, especially the Jingxing Pass, to cut off Han Xin's rear once he had entered the mountains. But Chen Yu was a follower of Confucianism and prided himself on commanding with righteousness. He responded that he had no desire to win through dishonourable means and had no need for such a strategy anyway since his army was so superior.

It was a catastrophic decision. Had Chen Yu followed the advice then Han Xin's army, far from home, would have been beset by logistical problems and disintegrated. Han Xin learned of this decision from one of his spies in the Zhao camp. This lack of intervention left the path open for him to set in motion a plan that was as audacious as it was astute.

### A DARING DEPLOYMENT

Once the forces of Han Xin were within the Jingxing Pass, they saw the Zhao army encamped on the plain to the east. In the middle of the night, Han Xin sent 2,000 hand-picked light cavalry to exit the Taihang Mountains along a goat track and find a position that overlooked the Zhao army behind their encampment. He gave them orders to seize the Zhao camp when the opportunity presented itself.

Just before dawn, Han Xin ensured that his troops ate a simple breakfast, adding that they would feast upon destroying the Zhao army. Not even his officers believed him. Han Xin then sent an advance force of 10,000 men through the Jingxing Pass into the Central Plain and ordered them to take up position with their backs against the Tao River.

By daylight, according to Sima Qian, the Zhao soldiers were laughing at the fact that the Han troops were knowingly placing themselves in such a vulnerable position.

### FIGHT OR DIE

At dawn, once the advanced guard had taken up its position, Han Xin and his remaining 18,000 infantry troops - displaying the banners and drums of General-in-chief Han Xin's office - marched down the east side of the Jingxing Pass onto the Central Plain.

On seeing this, Chen Yu ordered the Zhao army to attack from its encampment to the east. The opposing sides clashed, and Han Xin's main force fought for some time before conducting a feigned retreat towards the position of the advance guard on the river, abandoning some of their flags and drums. The Han army's advance guard opened its ranks to receive their comrades.



Qin Shi Huang was the founder of the Qin dynasty and the first emperor of a unified China

姓名: 秦始皇  
名: 嬴政  
字: 政  
生卒: 公元前259年—公元前210年  
在位: 公元前221年—公元前210年  
谥号: 始皇帝

Qin Shi Huang ordered the construction of the Great Wall of China to begin in 221 BCE



## “JUST BEFORE DAWN, HAN XIN ENSURED HIS TROOPS ATE A SIMPLE BREAKFAST, ADDING THAT THEY WOULD FEAST UPON DESTROYING THE ZHAO ARMY”

Tactically, Han Xin's decision to order his men to form up with their backs to the river seemed little short of suicide. With the swift-flowing river behind them, there was no line of retreat for the Han army, and they could have been slaughtered. But for Han Xin, it was a strategy borne out of necessity. Most of his elite troops had been requisitioned by Liu Bang, and Han Xin knew their only means of survival was to instil a fight-to-the-death mentality among his relatively weak and untrained troops. With the Zhao army approaching, Han Xin shouted to his troops, "There is no way back for you. You will only die if you don't fight bravely."

### NO WAY BACK

In retrospect, it seems an absurd and unlikely outcome, but instilling this mentality in the Han soldiers galvanised them. They were also aided by the fact that the riverside position was difficult to flank. The Zhao followed the retreating forces and clashed with the Han by the river. The Zhao poured more and more troops against the Han,

leaving their own camp vulnerable. On seeing this, the light cavalry advance force that Han Xin had dispatched to the mountains the previous night seized the Zhao camp and raised the red banners of the Han army.

Against sizable odds, the Han infantry at the river began to repel the Zhao troops, who started to withdraw. But when they turned back towards their camp and saw the red banners of the Han hanging from the barricades, panic set in. Han Xin used this to order a counterattack with the main Han force. The Zhao army, now in total disarray, soon collapsed and its remnants fled. Chen Yu was eventually caught on the Zhi River and cut down.

### LASTING LEGACY

At the victory feast after the battle, Han Xin's officers, all somewhat astounded by their immense good fortune, asked Han Xin to explain the reasoning behind his deployments. Han Xin replied that as he was leading a much smaller army consisting of largely inexperienced troops, he had to resort to drastic measures in order to force everyone to fight harder. Han Xin's strategy would lead to the saying 'You achieve survival by fighting from a position of certain death.'

The Han victory at the Battle of Jingxing significantly bolstered Liu Bang's power base. In 204 BCE, Han Xin won three more battles against the Zhao and captured the capital of Handan. By the age of just 25, he was appointed commander-in-chief. He would later confront Chu forces sent to wrest control of the state on two separate occasions and annihilate both hosts.

By 203 BCE, Liu Bang had conferred upon Han Xin the titles of king of Qi and king of Chu as a reward. However, he soon began to fear Han Xin's growing influence, and in 202 he demoted him. Six years later Han Xin would be accused of participating in a rebellion, lured into a trap, and executed on the orders of Empress Lü Zhi. "I have been deceived by such vile people. This is the heaven's will!" he is believed to have cried before being put to death.

Undefeated in battle, Han Xin would in time become known as the 'God of War'. It was his guile, pragmatism, and vision that ensured he and his relatively untrained army prevailed at the Battle of Jingxing. The fact that he is still regarded as the finest martial mind in the annals of Chinese history is testament to his tactical brilliance.





### AN ABSENCE OF ELEPHANTS

While it is well known that Hannibal successfully brought a herd of war elephants over the Alps (37 to be precise), these lumbering beasts were in fact only used at the Battle of the Trebia in 218 BCE. They had all but perished by the time the Carthaginian general prepared to fight at Cannae.

### SPEED OVER SUBSTANCE

Much of Hannibal's army was lightly armoured, a force built more for speed and agility than crushing power. The ability of the mixed soldiers under Hannibal's command to outmanoeuvre their Roman adversaries ultimately led to a bloodbath of epic proportions.

### MID-AFTERNOON MASSACRE

As predicted by the former Roman dictator Quintus Fabius Maximus, the Battle of Cannae was a catastrophe for Rome, with approximately 50,000 men being slaughtered and 20,000 taken prisoner. Only about 14,000 soldiers managed to escape.





# BATTLE OF CANNAE

**EAGER TO CRUSH HANNIBAL IN OPEN  
BATTLE, TWO ROMAN GENERALS LED  
THEIR MEN INTO A DEADLY TRAP**

Written by Charles Ginger

## RINGS OF DEATH

Among the slain Romans lay several hundred knights - elite soldiers who wore golden rings to distinguish themselves. These glistening status symbols were pried from their bloodied hands and taken to Carthage, where Mago poured them out onto the floor of the Senate building to a hail of applause.

In one of the bloodiest battles in ancient history, Rome confronted its greatest foe, Hannibal, at Cannae in an effort to halt the Carthaginian commander's invasion of Italy. Hannibal had the Roman Republic on the back foot from the get go, destroying the Roman-allied city of Saguntum in Iberia (modern-day Spain) in 219 BCE before shocking the world by crossing the treacherous slopes of the Alps to enter Italy with an army and 37 elephants the following year. He quickly defeated the Romans at Trebia and Lake Trasimene, inflicting crushing losses.

A panicked Senate appointed a dictator - a ruler temporarily entrusted with absolute power during an emergency - by the name of Quintus Fabius Maximus to take control. However, Maximus was wary of meeting Hannibal in open combat and favoured sending armies into the countryside to fall upon any towns that supported Rome's nemesis. He believed that this, coupled with depleting supplies and little hope of reinforcement, would fatally weaken Hannibal's marauding army. Unfortunately for Maximus, his pragmatic approach did not go down well, with many lambasting him as a *cunctator* (delayer).

Exploiting the growing fissures in Roman command, Hannibal cunningly ordered his men to spare any property belonging to Maximus while incinerating the homes of the rest of the political elite. This ploy resulted in accusations of treason being levelled at Maximus, who struggled to convince his peers that he had not made a secret pact with the Carthaginian devil.

In 217 BCE, the Senate elected to replace Maximus with two consuls, Lucius Aemilius Paullus and Gaius Terentius Varro, who would take joint command of 80,000 men, one of the largest Roman armies assembled to date.

The two sides met in August 216 BCE. Hannibal, who by this time had lost an eye in a skirmish, was the first to arrive with his 50,000-strong army at the battle site outside the village of Cannae, in southeastern Italy. As well as allowing him to seize control of a nearby grain silo, Hannibal dominated the River Aufidus, the main water source in the area. While Paullus deemed it foolish to fight Hannibal on an open plain when the Carthaginian possessed a larger, more superior cavalry, Varro was so determined to snatch glory that he commanded his men to form ranks beyond the south bank of the river. This forced the already hungry and thirsty army to approach with the hot wind in their faces - blowing dust and grit into their eyes - a disadvantage that cannot be ignored.

The battle that followed was a disaster for Rome, with up to 50,000 troops slaughtered in a simple yet brilliant encirclement. It had a devastating impact on Roman society, with a day of mourning declared and the city apparently resorting to human sacrifices to appease the gods and rescue the situation. Despite having such a dangerous enemy on their doorstep, the Romans refused to surrender and, thanks to their vast wealth and manpower, ultimately won the Second Punic War, sending Hannibal skulking back to Carthage in 203 BCE.





## Carthage

**TROOPS:** 40,000  
**CAVALRY:** 10,000



### HANNIBAL BARCA LEADER

Allegedly compelled as a boy by his father, Hamilcar, to pledge his life to the destruction of Rome, Hannibal grew into a brilliant commander.

**Strengths:** Hannibal managed to forge a rag-tag group of mercenaries and foreign troops into a ruthless fighting machine.

**Weaknesses:** Far from home and with little hope of being reinforced, it was all or nothing for Hannibal.



### NUMIDIAN CAVALRY KEY UNIT

Described by Livy as "by far the best horsemen in Africa", Numidian riders shunned saddles, commanding their steeds with a rope around the neck.

**Strengths:** Fast and agile, the Numidian cavalry was able to outmanoeuvre opponents before wheeling away from any reprisals.

**Weaknesses:** If these riders were unhorsed by opponents they would be extremely vulnerable.



### SLINGSHOT KEY WEAPON

Famed for their skill, Balearic slingers constructed their weapons of choice from a type of rush, meaning they were relatively quick, easy, and cheap to make.

**Strengths:** Deadly at ranges of up to 400m (1,300ft), slings could exceed the distance achieved by a bow.

**Weaknesses:** Slingshots were probably not particularly effective if they struck armour.

### 1 STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Confident that nothing can withstand the sheer weight of the largest Roman army ever assembled, Gaius Varro orders his infantry to adopt a tighter, deeper formation than the one usually deployed by Roman armies. While this makes for an awesome vision of Roman might, it fatally constricts the space in which the infantry can manoeuvre and fight, compressing it into a narrow wedge that can only march forwards.

### 2 CAUTION THROWN TO THE WIND

The glory-hungry Varro orders his army to cross to the south bank of the Aufidus River, a position that, once they face west, places the sea behind them. Committing the cardinal sin of war, Varro has allowed Hannibal to fight the battle on his terms, while the Romans are having to march into a hot southerly wind.

### 3 THE TRAP IS SET

Hannibal opts to use the Roman infantry's size against it. Distributing his infantry (largely Gauls and Spaniards) in a thin convex line facing the enemy, Hannibal moves his light troops (slingers and spearmen) to form up behind them. He then positions his heavy African infantry and mercenaries in reserve before placing his Spanish cavalry on the left under the command of his brother Hasdrubal and his Numidian horsemen to the right under his nephew Hanno.

### 4 A LETHAL LURE

Leading from the centre alongside Mago, another of his siblings, Hannibal sallies forth to provoke the Roman hordes and ensure that they march directly towards his centre.

### 5 CLASH OF THE CAVALRY

As the two sets of infantry meet in the centre, a vicious fight ensues on the flanks as the opposing cavalry collide. The Spanish horsemen career into their Roman counterparts and rout them before wheeling around to help their Numidian comrades finish off the doomed riders under the command of Varro.

### 6 A MEASURED WITHDRAWAL

Believing it is rolling up a weakening opponent, the Roman infantry surges forward. Hannibal orders some of his men to begin a withdrawal, allowing fresh ones to come in - a ploy that sucks the enemy troops into the jaws of death.





## Rome

**TROOPS:** 80,000  
**CAVALRY:** 6,400



## GAIUS TERENTIUS VARRO

### LEADER

Gaius Varro possessed all the desire but none of the talent or experience required to competently confront a general of Hannibal's pedigree.

**Strengths:** Utterly determined to end the threat posed by Hannibal, Varro marched out to face a general who had yet to taste defeat.

**Weaknesses:** Varro ignored his more cautious fellow commander, a decision that ultimately led to the massacre of an entire army.



## INFANTRY

### KEY UNIT

The heart of any Roman army, the infantry was a well-oiled, highly disciplined machine capable of systematically cutting through a far larger army.

**Strengths:** The soldiers at Cannae were fighting to save a Roman city, which instilled a gritty determination in the ranks.

**Weaknesses:** Due to severe losses in manpower, the army that marched to Cannae was mostly comprised of raw recruits.



## PILUM

### KEY WEAPON

With a head of strong steel and a shaft comprised of lighter steel, this ingenious weapon could be used in close-quarters fighting or launched at the enemy.

**Strengths:** With a weight of up to 5kg (11lb) and a pyramidal head, the pilum could puncture both armour and shields.

**Weaknesses:** While its weight made it a lethal missile, the pilum would have proved heavy to wield in prolonged hand-to-hand fighting.

## 10 HANNIBAL'S CAPTIVES

After the battle approximately 20,000 Romans find themselves in Hannibal's custody, who is quick to stress that he is not in Italy to destroy Rome; rather, he wishes to emancipate the Italians under Roman control and restore Carthage's honour. However, Rome does not wish to entertain talk of peace on Hannibal's terms, a rejection that so enrages the African commander that he forces his prisoners to fight one another to the death.

## 9 THE CIRCLE CLOSES

With his enemy exactly where he wants it, Hannibal presses the advantage, his men methodically cutting down their terrified opponents with ruthless efficiency. The killing takes all day, claiming the lives of around 50,000 Romans, including 80 senators and Lucius Paullus. Varro, who had been so sure of victory, flees to Rome.

## 8 HANNIBAL'S CAVALRY RETURNS

Having put their opponents to flight, Hanno and Hasdrubal turn their steeds back towards the main battle. Thousands of hooves beat the dry ground as the agile Spanish and Numidian cavalry charge for the Roman rear, crashing into the exposed foot soldiers unfortunate enough to find themselves stationed at the back of an army that is now surrounded on all sides. The folly of Varro's formation is brutally revealed, with dire consequences.

## 7 MERCENARIES ON THE MOVE

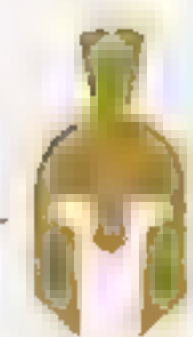
The moment now arrives for the heavily armed African infantry that Hannibal had held in reserve. These battle-hardened men, bearing the armour, swords, and shields stripped from dead Romans at the Battle of Trasimene the year before, smash into the flanks of the Roman infantry. Panic ripples through the cramped Roman army as men struggle to wield their weapons in the crush of bodies. Their struggle will be in vain.





# AKKADIANS AT WAR

## HOW THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE REVOLUTIONISED WARFARE TO CREATE AN UNSTOPPABLE FIGHTING FORCE



Written by Frances White

**C**onsidering the immense power it wielded and influence it held over the world, it's surprising how the city of Akkad is steeped in mystery. Nobody knows exactly where it was located, how it rose to become so prominent, or even the exact circumstances of its fall. Yet despite all this, Akkad was once the seat of what is largely regarded as one of the first true empires in history.

It was under the leadership of Sargon the Great, a man as steeped in legend as Akkad itself, that the Akkadian Empire began to bloom, flourish, and conquer. In the 24th century BCE, ancient Mesopotamia was divided between the powerful Sumerians in the south and the developing Akkadians in the north. Having ousted the previous king, Ur-Zababa of Kish, Sargon was soon challenged by the most powerful king in Sumer, Lugal-Zage-si. Lugal-Zage-si had managed to unite the warring city-states of Sumer into a kind of empire. However, in a shock result, Sargon defeated the mighty king. While doing so he captured a large number of Sumer's most important leaders. After being greatly underestimated, Sargon set his sights on bringing all of Sumer and beyond under his control.

Sargon continued his great military conquest and marched against Ur, then from Lagash to the Lower Sea. Sargon conquered his way from the

Persian Gulf and captured the last stronghold of his enemies, the city of Umma. Although Sargon's conquest began with Sumer, it grew rapidly, stretching to Syria and the Taurus Mountains in modern-day Italy.

Ancient Mesopotamia was not unfamiliar with conquerors; it had been conquered before. However, these "empires" never usually spread beyond Sumer and were very quickly ended with the death of the conqueror. But the Akkadian Empire was different; its land stretched far beyond anything that had been conquered before and would go on to not only outlive Sargon himself but actually thrive for nearly two centuries.

So how did Sargon achieve this? And what did he put in place to ensure it would not crumble after his death? One man's tenacity and skill can only extend so far, and as committed as Sargon was to extending his power, he was even more dedicated to ensuring his empire would survive for generations to come. His most impressive innovation, and arguably the most significant contribution to his success, was the unstoppable Akkadian war machine he created during his illustrious reign.

It is said that over 50 years of ruling, Sargon fought in 34 wars and amassed a core military force of around 5,400 men. Although this number does not sound impressive today,









## THE GREAT EMPIRE-BUILDER



Sargon the Great did not always enjoy the trappings of royalty, the future conqueror had a very humble beginning. Sargon's mother was likely a temple priestess, and the identity of his father remains unknown. The legend goes that, unable to keep the baby, his mother sent Sargon adrift in a reed basket on the Euphrates River. He was found by the gardener of the king of Kish, who made Sargon his cup bearer when he came of age before promoting him to a position of leadership as a young man. Sargon would learn many valuable lessons during his time serving the king.

Years later, when Sargon had claimed the many cities of Sumer, he installed his own trusted men in each one to keep them under his control. He continued to conquer territory after territory, taking Elam (Iran), Mari, Asher, parts of Syria, Lebanon, and Anatolia (Turkey). With all of Mesopotamia under his control, Sargon set about building the city of Akkad.

The key to Sargon's control over his expansive empire was placing people he trusted in positions of power. He made his own daughter the priestess of Inanna, a powerful role that allowed her to influence religious and political affairs for over 40 years. Because of the tight power network, any rebellions were promptly squashed. Sargon was not just power hungry, however, his reign also oversaw the creation of roads and irrigation canals in his cities. Trade flourished, as did science and the arts. He even created a form of postage system and was popular for his fair taxes. After his death in 2284 BCE, the legendary status of Sargon saw him revered like a god.



The legend around Sargon's birth displays similarities to that of Moses and Oedipus



This elaborate bronze head is thought to represent either Sargon or Naram-Sin

in ancient Mesopotamia it constituted a massive force, one commonly believed to have been the first professional standing army in history.

Before Sargon the typical Sumerian city would have armies comprised of militia troops: regular, paid armies just didn't exist. Instead, every able-bodied male was seen as a potential soldier and could be called to arms if his king demanded it. Apart from the palace guard (comprising less than 1,000 men), these cities did not have professional soldiers to summon when war broke out. If an army did need to be assembled, an average Sumerian city could muster a force of approximately 7,000 men. When you factor in troops needed for transportation, garrisoning positions, and those who inevitably deserted, the actual force a Sumerian city could call upon in times of war was roughly 5,000, of which maybe only 20 per cent were trained professionals. This method actually worked well for so long because it meant no Sumerian city was significantly more powerful than another, and domination of one neighbour over another was rare. On several occasions Sumerian cities would team up to create a larger force to take down an enemy. It was all about numbers.

Sargon, however, scrutinised this system and worked out that if he wanted not only to conquer

but to hold onto his new lands, he would need to create a trained, professional standing army, one that no city-state could hope to best. With such a large empire to maintain, a huge standing army of over 5,000 wasn't just a desire, it was necessary.

In order to swell the ranks of his professional army, it is likely Sargon poured the armies of his conquered cities into his own. Maintaining an army of this size also required a high degree of military organisation, administration, and logistics. Sargon was skilled in these areas and also delegated this work to many of his trusted advisors and leaders. It is also likely that Sargon diverted some of the privileges enjoyed by the Sumerian temples towards this cause, ensuring that workers and materials were transferred away from the temples and instead into his armies. This method paid dividends, as the resulting armies ensured peace was maintained and provided a boon to the regional economies of his cities.

However, it wasn't just the size and training of the Akkadian armies that made them superior; it was also their techniques and the weapons they were armed with. One of the most significant innovations was the use of the composite bow. It is difficult to pin down exactly when the bow began to be used, but it was likely during the reign of Sargon's grandson, the great Naram-Sin. Similar to





It is believed that the empire fell in approximately the 22nd century BCE



## “THE COMPOSITE BOW SOON BECAME CRUCIAL, WITH ARMIES IN THE REGION STILL RELYING ON IT 1,500 YEARS LATER”

his grandfather, Naram-Sin was an accomplished conqueror, and in a statue celebrating one of his victories he is armed with a composite bow, which is the first recorded appearance of the deadly weapon in history.

The reason the bow was so important and impressive was due to the devastation it could inflict. While the ordinary bow could kill at distances from 46 to 91 metres (150 to 298 feet), it was not able to penetrate armour from this range. The composite bow, however, was made from wood, horn, and animal sinew and boasted two to three times the pull power of a normal wooden bow. Not only could the arrows shot from it travel double the distance of an ordinary bow, but they could also penetrate leather armour. It is possible the power of the composite bow was so great that it could even penetrate bronze armour, which was being developed at the time.

While the normal bow required a great degree of skill to kill with, the composite bow could be deadly even in the hands of an untrained

archer. To put it simply, Akkadians armed with composite bows against an army equipped with normal ones would have been akin to bringing guns to a knife fight. The composite bow soon became crucial, with armies in the region still relying on it 1,500 years later.

Not only did Akkad have the biggest numbers and the best-trained soldiers, but now, with the bow, it was blessed with superior weapons. The Akkadian war machine was well oiled and deadly, its armies highly trained and professional, a huge advantage when pitted against the poorly armed and untrained skirmishers that made up the bulk of other nations' armies.

Sargon's relentless lust for power and control was backed up by his impressive administration and strategic skills. His nation's innovation in establishing an army that was comprised of skilled, trained men rather than a militia was hugely influential, not only for his own reign but for countless conquerors who would follow for millennia after him.



Enheduanna, Sargon's daughter, was the first named author in the history of the world





ANCIENT BATTLES

# BATTLE OF RED CLIFFS

UNCOVER THE ROOTS OF THE STRUGGLE THAT  
USHERED IN THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD



Written by Matthew T. Flinders





**T**he twilight of the Han dynasty wrought great unrest and rivalry across China. Decades of palace intrigue had undermined the authority of the Han emperors, who ruled under their claim to the Mandate of Heaven, a doctrine that had existed for a millennium.

By 184 CE, Emperor Lingdi was on the horns of a dilemma. The latest uprising among the people, the Yellow Turban Rebellion led by the Taoist healer Zhang Jue, threatened to topple the Han and had to be crushed. Lingdi listened to the counsel of advisor Liu Yan and empowered regional and provincial officials to individually deal with the uprising as they saw fit within their respective territories. In so doing, Lingdi had sown the seeds of even greater upheaval and given rise to an era of powerful warlords.

In the north, Cao Cao became master of vast territory, while the southern regions were

## “DECADES OF PALACE INTRIGUE HAD UNDERMINED THE AUTHORITY OF THE HAN EMPERORS”

dominated by Liu Bei of the Kingdom of Shu Han and Sun Quan of the Kingdom of Eastern Wu. At first, the Guandong Coalition of 26 warlords had opposed the power grab of another warlord, Dong Zhou, who had taken the boy emperor Liu Bian, heir to Lingdi, who died in 189 CE, into custody. Dong had proclaimed himself ruler of China while in possession of both the Han emperor and the imperial seal.

While the coalition declared its objectives as the restoration of the Han dynasty and the rescue of Liu Bian, now known as Emperor Shao, Dong had the young Han ruler executed in favour of his brother, Emperor Xian. At length, Dong was assassinated by a close confidante, and Emperor Xian became the “guest” of whichever warlord controlled the city of Chang’an at any given time.

Predictably, the coalition disintegrated as the rival warlords sought pre-eminence. Emperor Xian escaped Chang’an in 195 CE and found refuge with Cao Cao in the north. The final gasp of the Han dynasty’s true power passed with the ambitions of the warlords, each consolidating territory and disposing of weaker leaders within their spheres of influence. Cao Cao gained the upper hand with the emperor and imperial seal within his domain. However, he chose to expand his territorial holdings and claim outright



Cao Cao depicted in a painting from the Long Corridor at the Summer Palace in Beijing





Cao Cao watches the moon rise over Mount Nanping around the time of the Battle of Red Cliffs



Warlord Sun Quan is depicted in this artwork created during the Tang dynasty

authority by marching southward to vanquish his opposition, namely Liu Bei and Sun Quan.

## CAO CAO FLEXES HIS MILITARY MUSCLE

Cao Cao had proven himself ruthlessly driven and willing to fight. He had no pangs of mercy or loyalty to his old friend Yun Shao, whom he soundly defeated in the Battle of Guandu in 200 CE. For the next seven years, he continued his campaign of conquest and became master of the entire North China Plain.

Looking southward, Cao Cao saw an opportunity for complete dominion before him. Flush with victory, he turned to the south at the head of an army whose true strength is unknown, although estimates place his force between 240,000 and 800,000 strong. He rightly recognised the mighty River Yangtze as the key to domination of the south. A decisive victory against his southern adversaries, Sun Quan, Lui Bei, and Liu Biao, along the Yangtze would place the great waterway in his control, and with it would come control of economic and commercial activity throughout China.

The southern warlords, no less ambitious than Cao Cao, were aware of the imminent invasion of their lands and marshalled forces to oppose Cao Cao's bid for total victory. They raised an army of their own, estimated at 50,000 to 80,000 troops, and set out to contest control of the Yangtze. Ironically, the decisive battle of the rival warlords would involve a naval confrontation after each had realised his earlier territorial gains on land.

## MARCH TO WAR

Cao Cao set out on his southward march in the late summer of 208 CE. His first objective was the port city of Jiangling on the Yangtze. With Jiangling in his hands, Cao Cao could manipulate commercial traffic along much of the river's course and facilitate the supply and replenishment of his army as it continued to stab its way southward. Although his army captured Jiangling without opposition, Cao Cao knew that a showdown was in the offing. The southern warlords would not simply yield to his display of military might.

Although Liu Biao died early in the formation of the southern alliance, Sun Quan and Lui Bei assembled their formidable force with the assistance of proven military tacticians and men who had gained fame during earlier battles and were revered as leaders. Liu Bei gave his trusted lieutenant Guan Yu command of the

soldiers who would approach Cao Cao's army via the Yangtze, while he personally took charge of the land army. Guan Yu was well known for his battlefield prowess and was later even deified with the honorary name of Guan Gong, the god of war and protection. Another valued associate was Zhou Yu, recognised as a gifted military strategist.

The opposing forces brushed one another as Cao Cao pushed south, and the invading army nearly accomplished its objective in a single day. Cao Cao's forces fell on the marching columns under Liu Bei and dispersed them in confusion. However, uncharacteristically for Cao Cao, he did not follow up his initial success, failing to destroy the opposing army. Typically a thorough planner, he had not necessarily understood the hardships of a long, gruelling march, the resupply of a vast army in difficult country, or the resourcefulness of his opponents. Even as he appeared on the cusp of triumph, many of his soldiers were simply too exhausted to press the advantage or were too ill to fight effectively. The sheer size of Cao Cao's army may well have contributed to its forthcoming undoing.

Guan Yu successfully extricated Liu Bei's soldiers from the precarious situation, transporting them down the Yangtze to sanctuary along the riverbank. Determined to use the great Yangtze to their advantage, the southern coalition had trained half its troops to fight a naval battle, while the other half was to remain in position near the riverbank to strike first or to exploit any advantage gained in a river fight. On the other hand, another issue confronting Cao Cao was the reality that his soldiers knew little about combat on water. It was a glaring deficiency considering the decisive battle that loomed ahead and appears even more critical given the original northern objective and the large number of ships Cao Cao accumulated during earlier victories.

## RECKONING AT RED CLIFFS

In the winter of 208 CE, the decisive battle among the rival warlords was developing like a great typhoon, a storm of spear, sword, and arrow that would shape the future of China for generations to come. The confident Cao Cao proceeded along the banks of the Yangtze and committed his army to the waterborne battle, herding men aboard ships and subjecting them to the sometimes violent rocking from the swift current. So many became seasick that Cao Cao is said to have lashed his ships together in a single tremendous block to lessen the effects of the roiling waves. With some difficulty, therefore, Cao Cao's army reached the southern shore of the Yangtze, where he tied the fortress-like assemblage of watercraft to whatever vegetation or rocky outcroppings could be found close to the town of Chibi Hubei. The coming showdown, however, would forever be known as the Battle of Red Cliffs.

Meanwhile, the southern generals watched with great interest. They observed Cao Cao's

**“THE STRIFE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS  
YEARS CONTINUED UNTIL THE  
UNIFICATION OF THE COUNTRY  
BY THE JIN DYNASTY  
IN 280 CE”**



The southern commander Zhou Yu watches flaming arrows fly towards Cao Cao's warships at Red Cliffs



manoeuvre and saw that many of his soldiers had been incapacitated by lack of food and water, seasickness, and the general rigour of their long march. Accounts differ as to the original author of the tactic that emerged among the coalition commanders, either Zhou Yu or Huang Gai is credited, and in fact the determination may have been a collaborative effort.

In the event, the plan was simple in its brilliance. Southern soldiers were ordered to fill their ships to the gunwales with highly combustible materials, including brush, logs, linen, and other available detritus. Huang Gai was tasked with an overture to Cao Cao, surreptitiously offering to defect and join forces with the northern warlord. In actuality, the proffered defection was a critical part of a clever ruse. While Cao Cao rejoiced and eagerly awaited the arrival of Huang Gai's ships to augment his force, a nasty surprise was being prepared for him. Skeleton crews were aboard the supposedly defecting ships, and when they approached the northern vessels, still bound together, these few men were to set their own ships alight and then escape aboard small craft hidden from sight.

The southern deception developed flawlessly as night settled in the area. Hundreds of Cao Cao's ships were engulfed in flames. Men and horses panicked. Many were burned to death. Others drowned. As the fire swept along the southern shore, Cao Cao's camp was consumed. Southern soldiers then fell upon Cao Cao's confused survivors and exacted a heavy toll. Cao Cao ordered a general retreat along the Huarong Road. Mired in mud and drenched in heavy rain, his remaining soldiers suffered terribly. His military strength never recovered from the shattering defeat at Red Cliffs.

Thus, the era of the Three Kingdoms, bloody decades of strife, rivalry, and upheaval, began. The kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu vied for pre-eminence and the rule of all China. It seems in the process that the Mandate of Heaven became obscured to a degree amid the personal ambitions of the competing warlords.

In modern China, the Battle of Red Cliffs is remembered as a watershed in the long history of the country. The Han dynasty existed as a mere bystander during the turbulent Three Kingdoms period, and Emperor Xian remained at Cao Cao's northern court. The strife of the Three Kingdoms years continued until the unification of the country by the Jin dynasty in 280 CE, more than 70 years after the discord surfaced as a byproduct of the southern victory at Red Cliffs.

The Battle of Red Cliffs is recalled in Chinese history and culture to this day, particularly in the 14th-century novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Luo Guanzhong and in the 2008 feature film *Red Cliff* directed by John Woo. Although the exact location of the battle remains unknown to us, an engraving on a prominent cliffside near Chi Hubei may well mark the scene of the historic clash of arms.

Eminent warlord Cao Cao inspects a cloth that has been presented to him







# BATTLE OF MARATHON

THE FIRST GREAT CLASH OF EAST AND WEST:  
GREECE AGAINST THE MIGHT OF PERSIA



Written by Manuel Delam



## OPPOSING FORCES



### PERSIANS

VS

### GREEKS

**LEADERS**  
Datis and Artaphernes  
(aided by ousted  
Athenian tyrant Hippias)

**LEADERS**  
Ten generals  
(including Miltiades,  
Stesilaus, and  
Callimachus)

**INFANTRY**  
24,000

**INFANTRY**  
10,000 ATHENIANS,  
1,000 PLATAEANS

**CAVALRY**  
1,000

**CAVALRY**  
0

**ARCHERS**  
The majority of the  
Persian forces were  
archers

**ARCHERS**  
0



**A**s soon as the first Persian arrow struck the ground in front of them, the Greek army was ordered to advance at a run. Eleven thousand heavily armed hoplites surged forward across the empty plain, 180 metres (200 yards) towards the Persian front lines. If they could survive the onslaught of arrows during their charge, they would be the first Greeks to meet the Persians in open battle – the first not to show fear in the face of the Persian Empire. But first they had to run into a steady rain of deadly enemy shafts.

The Battle of Marathon is vital – integral, even – to the history of the world and Western culture for a whole raft of reasons. It is the first time Greek hoplites faced the troops of the mighty Persian Empire, and the repulsion of the Persian invasion of Greek soil changed the course of history. No one expected the small force from Athens and Plataea to defeat the might of Persia, who outnumbered them at least two to one, perhaps more. If Athens had lost that day, the young democracy would have been destroyed, and in its place Athens would have become a vassal state of the Persian Empire. History as we know it would have been very

different. The fact that Athens achieved victory gave her, and Greece at large, a self-confidence she would never relinquish, the results of which still surround us today in art, politics, philosophy, architecture, culture, and language.

Marathon holds even more importance for the military historian. It is the first battle explored by reliable written history. Herodotus, ‘the father of history’, wrote his account in the 440s, and it represents the first history written by an actual historian rather than by a poet or a ruler (or their propaganda machine). That isn’t to say that there aren’t issues and complications surrounding Herodotus’ work, but it marks a fundamental shift in how history was recorded, and one of the pillars

of his account is the battle of Marathon (which comes in Book 6, chapters 102-117).

Herodotus’ version of the battle presents us with several challenges (just as it has with historians of every age), although the general outlines of the battle are clear. Herodotus remains the oldest and most trustworthy source of this seismic clash. What is more, even with these challenges and complications, we are still talking about the Battle of Marathon today and trying to understand exactly what happened more than 2,500 years ago. The fact that it still matters to people is testament to the importance of that September day on the Greek coast in 490 BCE, a day that arguably decided the fate of Europe.

**“IF ATHENS HAD LOST THAT DAY, THE YOUNG DEMOCRACY WOULD HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AND ATHENS WOULD HAVE BECOME A VASSAL STATE OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE. HISTORY AS WE KNOW IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFERENT”**







# ANCIENT BATTLES

## ANCIENT PRELIMINARIES

In July 490 BCE, a force of 600 triremes (warships) departed from the Persian province of Cilicia (on the Anatolian coast of modern-day Turkey) with the intention of punishing two Greek cities: Eretria and Athens. Both cities had assisted the cities of Ionia in a revolt against the Persian Empire five years earlier. The culmination of that revolt, before it was suppressed in 494, was the sacking of the ancient capital of Sardis.

According to Herodotus (6.94), the Persian King, Darius I, was told daily 'Remember Athens' to keep his anger at the sacrilege of the burning of Sardis' temples fresh. The expedition was intended to punish the Greek cities and enslave their populations. Darius sent two trusted commanders, Datis, a Mede, and his nephew Artaphernes, to lead what was expected to be a straightforward expedition. They were instructed to "reduce Athens and Eretria to slavery." Accompanying the expedition was Hippias, a tyrant of Athens who had been ousted 20 years earlier. He had taken up residence at the Persian court and intended to control his city once again with Persian help.

This expedition made its way via various Greek islands with the intent of ravaging or subjugating

## "THE PERSIAN KING, DARIUS I, WAS TOLD DAILY 'REMEMBER ATHENS' TO KEEP HIS ANGER AT THE SACRILEGE OF THE BURNING OF SARDIS' TEMPLES FRESH"

them. They captured Naxos and other islands and sailed on to Eretria. The Eretrians defended their city walls for six days before the city was betrayed. The Persians stripped their temples and burned them in revenge. Next they moved on to the Athenian *deme* (district or parish) of Marathon, chosen as their landing place because it was the centre of support for Hippias' family, the Peisistratids. It had been Hippias' father, Peisistratus, who had established a successful tyranny in Athens from 546 to 527 BCE.

## THE LANDING

Herodotus gives us no number for the Persian force that landed at Marathon, or indeed for the Athenians and Plataeans who opposed them. This marks the first time we are aware that Herodotus' priorities in recording the battle and ours in learning about it are at odds. Several ancient writers subsequently provide wildly exaggerated Persian numbers intended to make the achievements of the Athenians and Plataeans who opposed them all the more remarkable. The numbers of 10,000 Athenians and 1,000 Plataeans come from Cornelius Nepos (Miltiades 5.1), who makes the victory at odds of ten to one. This exaggeration is unnecessary, since the victory and accomplishment was still unprecedented.

Modern estimates assume 30 to 40 men per Persian trireme, which provides a number of between 18,000 and 24,000 men. Justin (2.9) talks of a Persian horde numbering 600,000 men, while a Simonides epigram gives their number as 90,000. There are many numbers in between. We also know from Herodotus' account that there were cavalry on the expedition (they were involved against Eretria, and he tells us (6.102) that the plain at Marathon was the best place for cavalry to operate on). Herodotus also mentions horse transports in addition to the 600 triremes, and yet in his account of the battle itself cavalry are absent. This is inexplicable and has led to all sorts of dissatisfaction with Herodotus and speculation from historians, beginning in the ancient world and continuing today.

Cavalry was an important part of Persian warfare, and so some say that cavalry was

present at the battle but was not mentioned, while others say that the cavalry was away foraging. At the same time, the Stoa Poikile (Painted Porch), built in the Athenian Agora later in the 5th century (around 460) featured a painting of the battle by the artist Panaenus. We have a description of the painting by the geographical writer Pausanias (1.15.3) that does not mention cavalry. At the same time, however, a Roman copy of the Stoa did include a Persian cavalryman, but he was not of high rank or important to the battle's outcome.

Elsewhere, Pausanias (1.32.4) talks of the field of Marathon as being haunted: "Every night you can hear horses neighing and men fighting." Pausanias also mentions that the painting had portraits of Callimachus and Miltiades, the two most prominent Athenians in Herodotus' version. One possibility is that Herodotus does mention cavalry. He names the Sacae in the Persian battle line (6.113), and the Sacae were a Scythian people who were renowned for providing the Persians with cavalry. They were armed with bows and axes. Despite our modern concerns, however, Herodotus provides reliable general outlines for events of the battle. With only a little work, we can know what happened that day. What else Herodotus tells us is intriguing for all sorts of reasons.

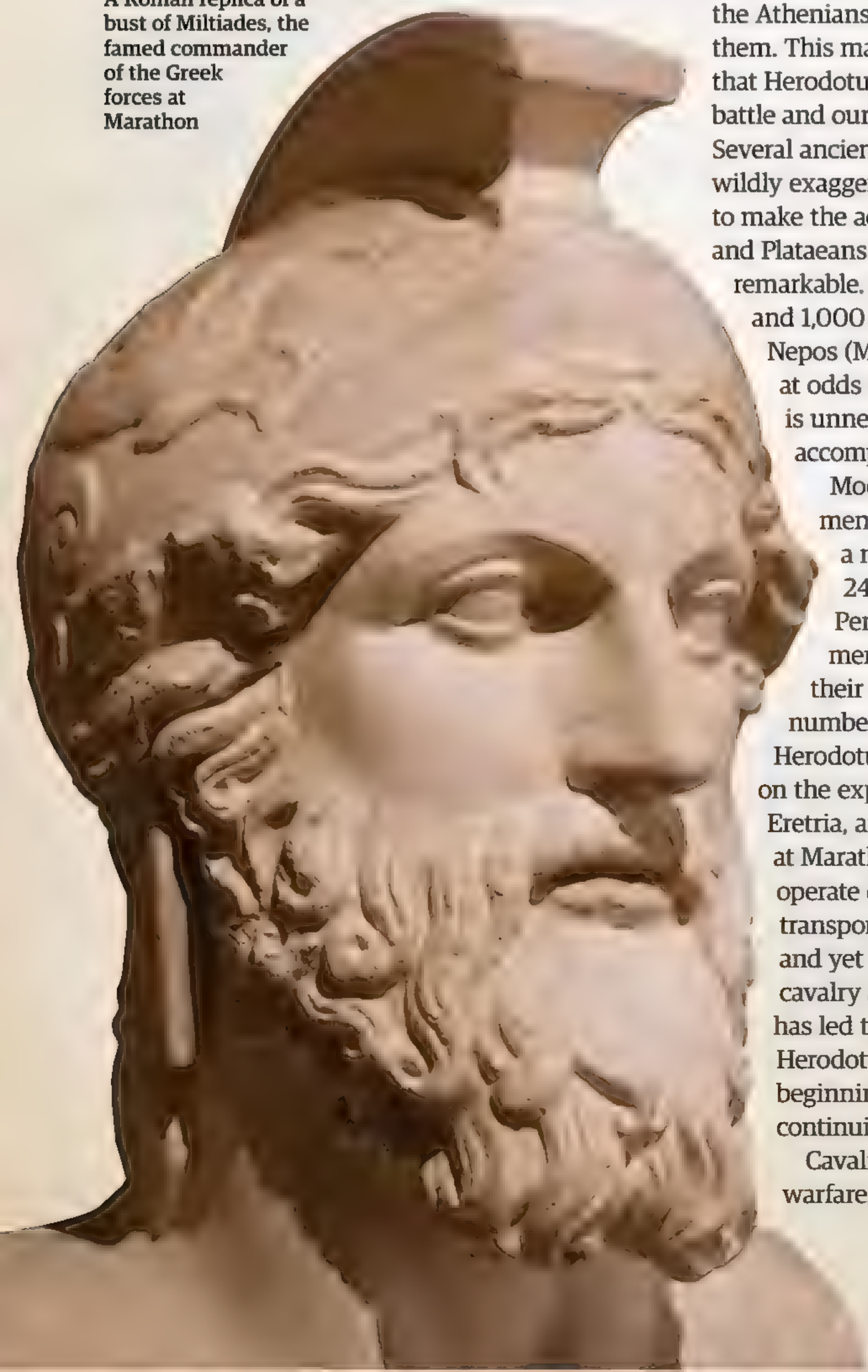
As soon as they learned of the landing at Athens, all adult males hurried to meet it, marching 42 kilometres (26 miles) to the site. We might imagine that every available man was mustered to serve - Pausanias mentions Athenian slaves fighting beside their masters at the battle (1.32.3). The Athenians had already known the Persians were coming. A contingent of 4,000 Athenian settlers from Chalcis had gone to the aid of Eretria but had been sent away to avoid being captured. These men may have returned to Athens. It was also probable that the Athenians had seen the smoke rising from Eretria and that this was a forewarning of the fate that awaited them should the Persians succeed.

Athens may also have learned from Eretria that defending the walls of the city would prove futile (and allow for betrayal of their city by pro-Persians within) and so determined to march out and meet the foe in open battle. The Athenians had therefore gathered their full strength and sent envoys to their allies to ask for assistance. Only the small Boeotian city of Plataea had answered the call, sending 1,000 of its hoplites. They also sent the professional runner Pheidippides to Sparta, who covered the 225 kilometres (140 miles) in two days. Sparta was acknowledged as having the best fighters in Greece, and any defence should have had them involved. The Spartans, however, were holding a religious festival, the Carneia, and would not come to the aid of Athens until the full moon.

## THE COMMANDERS

As we have heard, the commanders on the Persian side were Datis and Artaphernes, who were assisted by the local knowledge of Hippias. On the Athenian side things are slightly more

A Roman replica of a bust of Miltiades, the famed commander of the Greek forces at Marathon





# MARATHON



Pheidippides delivers news of the victory over the Persians to the people of Athens



Runners approach the burial mound at Marathon, Greece, 1937





## ANCIENT BATTLES

# BATTLE OF MARATHON

490 BCE

### 4 PACKED WINGS AND WEAKENED CENTRE

The Greek line of 11,000 men consists of a right wing (where Miltiades and Callimachus were stationed) of 2,000 men packed eight ranks deep, a left wing (1,000 Plataeans and 1,000 Athenians), and a centre of 7,000 Athenians four ranks deep.

### 3 BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN

After a delay, the Greeks offer battle. The Persians and Greeks draw up their battle lines; the Persians with their backs to the sea, the Greeks a mile inland on the first slopes of Mount Kotroni.

### 2 THE ATHENIANS MARCH

The Athenians march to Marathon and encamp at the opposite end of the bay in the precinct of Heracles. They are joined there by 1,000 men from Plataea arriving from the Vrana road.

### 5 AT THE RUN

The Greek line advances towards the Persians 'at the run'. They close all across the line, and there is fierce fighting. The Persian divisions are probably also divided into 24 units of 1,000 men ten ranks deep. The Sacae and Persians hold the centre.

### 6 THE LINES MEET, THE CENTRE BREAKS

While the wings hold, the Sacae and Persians break through the centre of the Greek lines. This is where the burial mound of the Athenian dead, the Soros, is later raised. The Persians pursue the defeated Greeks towards Mount Kotroni.

### 7 VICTORIOUS WINGS

The Greek wings emerge triumphant, and the Persian lines flee towards their ships on the Schoenia. The Greek wings join together and concentrate on defeating the victorious Persians and Sacae in the centre.

ATHENIAN  
CAMP



# MARATHON

## 8 THE CHASE TO THE SHIPS

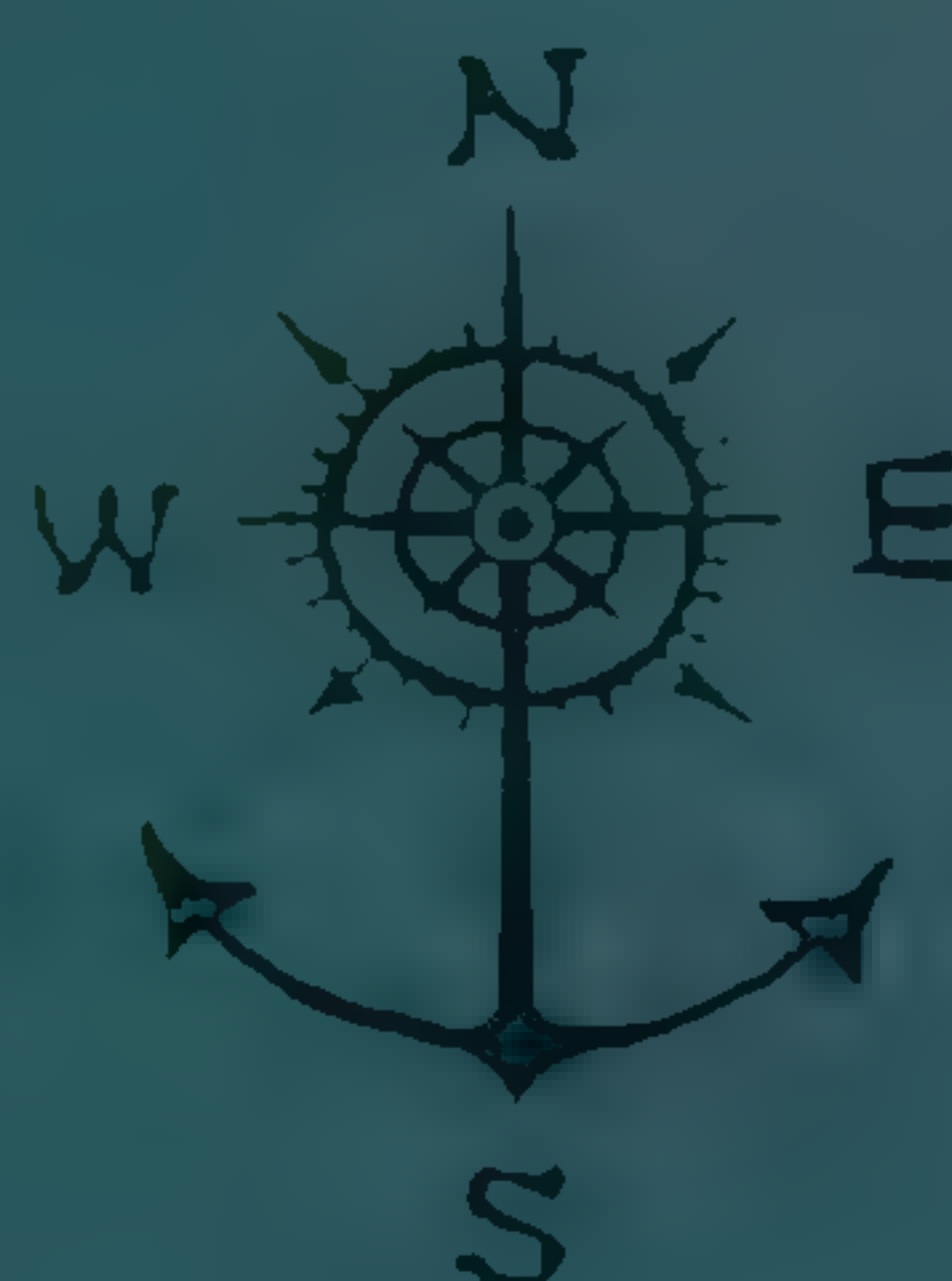
When the Persians and Sacae are defeated, the Greeks chase them and the remnants of the rest of the Persian army to the fleet. The Greeks take control of seven Persian triremes but also suffer losses in doing so.

PERSIAN  
CAMP

## 1 THE PERSIANS LAND

The Persian force of 600 ships lands, beaching their fleet on the northeastern end of Marathon Bay, the Schoenia. The swampy ground provides some protection for the fleet. The Persians make their camp in-land of the swamp.

ΚΟΛΠΟΣ  
ΠΕΤΑΛΙΟΝ



0 1 km

● PERSIAN ARMY

● GREEK ARMY

complicated. The Athenians were commanded by a board of ten generals (strategoi), with each probably in charge of 1,000 men drawn from each of the ten tribes of Athens.

An earlier institution was the appointment by lot of an overall general, or polemarch. In Herodotus' account we have both institutions - a board of ten generals (which included Miltiades) and an overall commander (Callimachus). There may be some crossover, as some historians date the board of ten generals to after the battle, and others accuse Herodotus of anachronism in including the older institution of the polemarch. It is possible that the two institutions were mixed for a time. It is also possible that Callimachus was regarded as the most senior general. Certainly, the role and prominence of both men in the battle is never questioned.

Another possible issue is the amount of credit given to Miltiades, regarded as the architect of the battle. Herodotus does not name all the other nine generals (only one other Athenian general is known, Stesilaus, who also died in the battle). Callimachus was the senior commander, but he was to die at his moment of glory when taking hold of the Persian ships.

When Herodotus was researching his account and talking to the veterans of Athens, it was Miltiades' son, Cimon, who was the most prominent and influential politician of the day. This may have influenced the amount of credit given to Cimon's father - Plutarch doesn't even mention Callimachus. Nonetheless, Miltiades was associated with the victory early in its history, and no one stepped forward to contradict his prominent involvement. He was also a man who had seen Persian tactics before in the Chersonese, and he may have been the only Athenian commander with such experience. That his knowledge would therefore be relied on would be natural. Herodotus emphasises Athenian unity in opposing the Persians, so the minutiae of who was in charge was not a primary concern.

## THE TWO SIDES WAIT

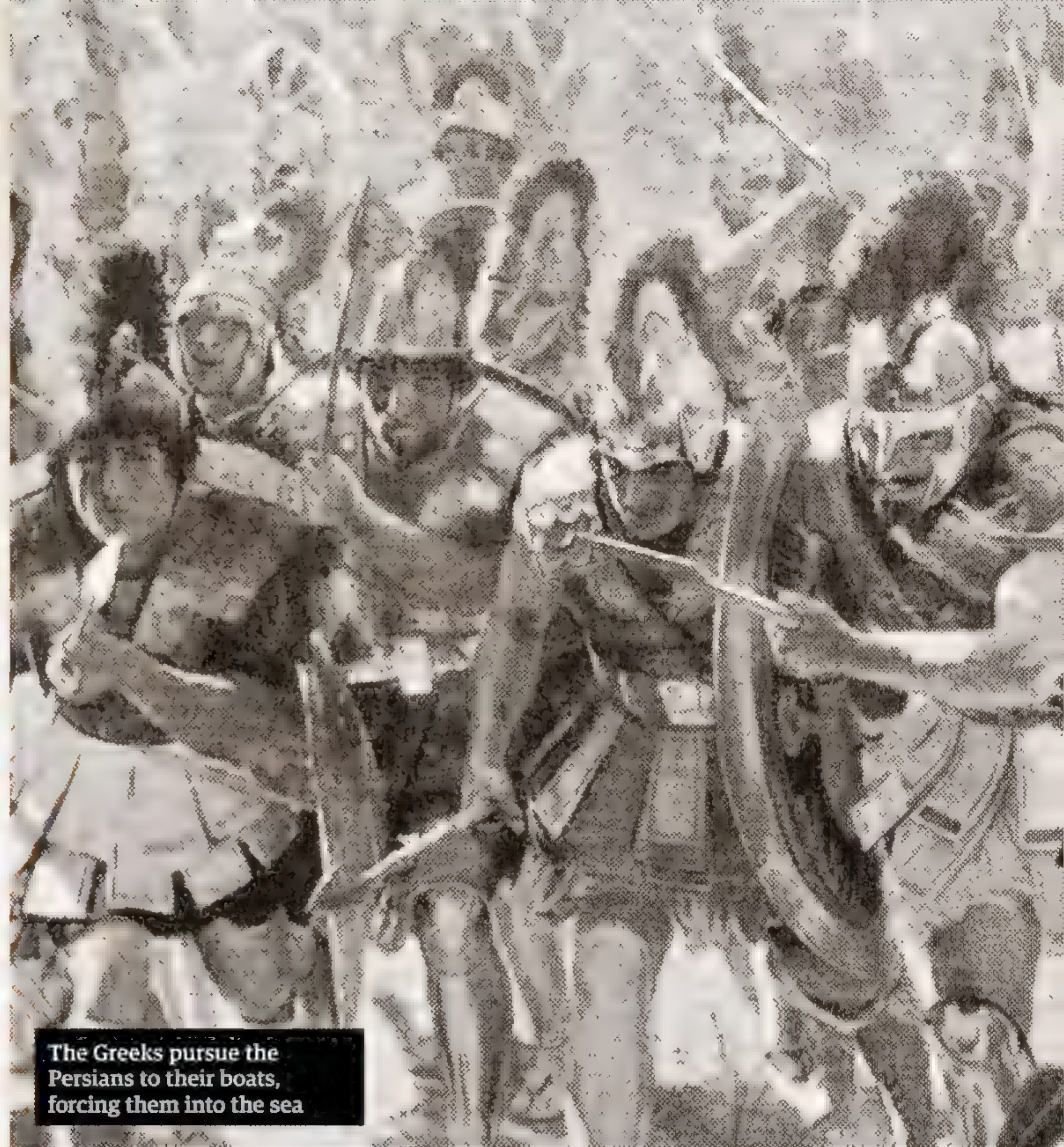
After marching out onto the plain of Marathon, the Athenians encamped in the precinct sacred to Heracles, where they were joined by the men of Plataea. Then they waited. This delay has caused several issues for modern reconstructions and provided the grounds for much speculation. Were the Athenians waiting for the Spartans to arrive? If that was the case then why was battle joined before the Spartans got there? In the event, 2,000 Spartans did arrive after the battle, surveyed the site, turned around, and went home.

Modern reconstructions speculate that the reason battle was joined early was that the Persians may have been moving troops on to the ships to sail and take the city of Athens. This speculation has the added advantage (to modern ears) that the cavalry may have been re-embarking, and so it explains two problems in one go - why there were no cavalry and why there was a battle without the Spartans. But





## ANCIENT BATTLES



The Greeks pursue the Persians to their boats, forcing them into the sea

again, there is very little in the sources to warrant such speculation. There was ancient speculation; Cornelius Nepos says that it was the Persians who attacked (Miltiades 5.5), but this absolutely contradicts all other accounts.

Plutarch includes the time it took to build an abatis to protect the Greek flanks from cavalry attacks. Speculation like this also helps these later writers explain why cavalry were not involved. Another possibility for the wait was that there may have been elements within Athens who welcomed the Persians and who would take their share of power if they co-operated with their new masters. One family, the Alcmaeonids, were accused of just that following the battle. Such men may have been arguing to prevent battle.

Herodotus explains the wait as having divided opinion among the Athenian commanders. Here, Herodotus' picture of the command structure works perfectly – the ten generals were divided equally 5:5 on whether to fight or not. Callimachus, as polemarch, broke the deadlock. Herodotus gives Miltiades a speech to persuade Callimachus around to his point of view. Even after the decision was taken to fight, there was still more delay. Herodotus explains this by saying that Miltiades waited for his day of command (the ten generals held the senior command by daily rotation). When that day came, we (the modern historians) finally get some satisfying detail.

### ARCHITECTURE OF WAR

When Miltiades' day of command finally came about (6.111), "The Athenian army moved into position for the coming struggle. The right wing was commanded by Callimachus – for it was the regular practice at that time in Athens that the polemarch should lead the right wing; then

followed the tribes, in their regular order; and, finally, on the left wing, were the Plataeans."

This is finally a satisfying chunk of text containing concrete detail for modern historians to grasp on to. We do not know what the regular order of the tribes was, so any more detailed arrangement of the Athenians is speculative. Military historians since the 19th century have been obsessed with exact troop dispositions, but in the case of this first battle in written history, we simply have to make do. We may also suggest, however, that Miltiades' tribe (of 1,000) was also that on the right – Callimachus as polemarch would not have had a tribe to command himself, as the rotation of the command would mean Miltiades' troops held the position of honour. Herodotus' next two chapters (6.112-113) give us the battle itself:

"One result of the disposition of Athenian troops before the battle was the weakening of their centre by the effort to extend the line sufficiently to cover the whole Persian front; the two wings were strong, but the line in the centre was only a few ranks deep."

This, too, satisfies the military historian – to a point. We tend to think that the wings were eight ranks deep and the centre four ranks deep. Exactly which units were involved in the wings and the centre is unknown. If 1,000 men were eight ranks deep then that gives a frontage of 125 men; if four ranks deep then a frontage of 250 men. Therefore, if each wing comprised 2,000 men, each wing would be 250 men wide. The weakened centre consisting of 7,000 men, at four ranks deep, would have a front of 1,750.

Arguments about how much space an individual hoplite took up vary; the consensus view is around 90 centimetres (35 inches). This would mean that,

based on the above calculations, the Athenian front would be 2,025 metres (6,750 feet). This would match the Persian frontage. We know from later sources that the Persian army also had units of 1,000 men and they may have drawn up in ten ranks. If that was the case at Marathon then, if they had 24,000 men, they would have had a frontage of about 2,160 metres (7,200 feet).

The crux of the battle comes in Herodotus' next sentence: "The Athenians advanced at a run towards the enemy, not less than a mile away." No one believes that the Athenians could have run that far in formation, in armour, and fought a battle at the end of it. Modern reconstructions instead say that the actual run was only for the final 180 metres (590 feet) – the range of Persian bow shots. Herodotus' emphasis is on the valour and courage of this charge, not its prowess as a feat of athletics. The legend was more important than the details:

"They were the first Greeks, so far as we know, to charge at a run, and the first who dared to look without flinching at Persian dress and the men who wore it; for until that day came, no Greek could hear even the word Persian without terror."

The Persians could not believe that the Greeks would advance in such a way without the support of cavalry or archers. They thought that the Greek charge was suicidal; surely they would all be mown down by their arrows. The Persians had not counted on the superior protection afforded by the hoplites' armour, shield, and helmet. The Greeks made their run and closed with the enemy all along the line, and, in Herodotus' phrase, "Fought in a way not to be forgotten." You can almost hear the cheers from Herodotus' (Athenian) audience as he read his work out to them. He tells us that in the centre the Persians and Sacae broke through





the Greek line and pursued the defeated hoplites “inland from the sea”. This phrase gives us pause for thought on the position of the battle lines.

Most maps show the battle as running across the plain, at 90 degrees to the shore. If that is the case, then this phrase must be metaphorical, ‘inland’ meaning simply ‘invasion’. If the battle lines ran parallel to the shore, however, the pursuit inland makes more sense. The placement of the burial mound for the Athenian dead, the Soros, also makes more sense if the lines were parallel to the sea. The Soros is still there today, and its position is most likely to have been where most of the Athenian casualties occurred, which was in the centre where the line broke. On the wings, however, the Greeks were victorious, so much so that they drove the Persians from the field and managed to join up and destroy those Persians who had broken through the Greek line in the centre. They chased the Persians to their ships, where there was another fight (and where several prominent Athenians died, including Callimachus). They then took seven ships from the Persians.

### AFTERMATH

As soon as the majority of the Persians had re-embarked in their ships, the fear was that they would make their way towards an undefended Athens. The Alcmaeonid family were accused of signalling this to the Persian fleet. This is a glimpse of the politics that could interfere with any military operation, and even in the glory of victory, contemporary politics would very soon find a way to intrude: The Athenian army had to race back to Athens. The fleet had to traverse 112 kilometres (70 miles) by sea, the Athenians 42 kilometres (26 miles) by land, but they were exhausted by having fought a battle.

## “EVEN IN THE GLORY OF VICTORY, CONTEMPORARY POLITICS WOULD VERY SOON FIND A WAY TO INTRUDE”

Nonetheless, they won the race, and arrived as the Persian fleet came into view. This was the first ‘marathon’ (although another story is of Pheidippides’ running back to Athens to tell them of the victory: “Nikomen!” (We win!) he cried and then fell dead). Finally defeated, the Persians turned around and sailed home. They would return ten years later with an army of 5 million men (according to Herodotus).

The Persian casualties amounted to 6,400 dead. The Athenians lost only 192 men. Their names were recorded in marble on the Soros raised in their honour. We can therefore be relatively sure of the number of Athenian dead (Herodotus would not have contradicted a monument that was well known and could be checked), although some historians have speculated that Herodotus’ number of Persian dead represents 100 dead per three Athenians.

### ANECDOTES OF BATTLE

Many of our sources for ancient battles are dissatisfying for modern readers because they do not describe or analyse the battle in question in the way we would like (or in the way we would hope to in the same position). Instead, they give a summary of events (sometimes highly confusing) and then move on to other things. Marathon is no

different. After a sketchy account that has caused centuries of debate, Herodotus moves on to anecdotes of what happened to individuals before the battle and within it. We hear of the god Pan being on the Athenian side (6.105), of Hippias sneezing out a tooth (6.107) and how this foretold he would lose, and in the battle itself, we hear of Cynegirus having his hand cut off as he seized a Persian ship (6.114), and Epizelus, who went blind when he faced a huge bearded warrior (6.117).

These anecdotes appear elsewhere too. Pausanias tells (1.32.5) of the legend of Echetlaeus, who supposedly fought at the battle with a plough, and Pheidippides’ marathon is recorded by Lucian (six centuries later). However, we need to remember that Herodotus was reciting his work for a (mostly) Athenian audience, and so they wanted to hear entertaining and exciting stories, not statistics and dispositions. Unlike us, they all knew how battle was fought, so the details of battle that to us are nuggets of gold would have seemed pedantic and boring to them. What happened to old Epizelus, however, was entertaining to that audience, although to us such stories get in the way of the details of battle.

While we will sadly never know all of the precise details from that fateful day, what is beyond doubt is that the Athenians had caused one of the greatest martial upsets in history.

Despite seemingly impossible odds, the Athenians had faced the Persian invasion with grim determination, adamant that they would defend their freedom and their families to the death. Their resounding victory, which injected the Greeks with newfound confidence and severely damaged Persian pride, will echo for an eternity.





## ANCIENT BATTLES

### DEADLY BOLTS

The scorpion was a small catapult operated by two men that used torsion springs to fire a heavy bolt up to 100 metres (330 feet). The Romans placed them in the wooden towers to help break up an enemy charge.

### ROMAN REINFORCEMENTS

Caesar empowered his legates to strip troops from unthreatened parts of the line to reinforce those sectors under attack. Because of the urgency required to prevent breaches, the legates did not have to request permission from Caesar before acting, saving crucial time.

### EAGLE EYES

The Romans constructed wicker towers from which guards watched closely around the clock for signs of an enemy attack. Archers and scorpion teams used them to fire on the enemy during battle.

### SHARPENED STAKES

Interlaced tree branches with pointed tips protruded from the top of the earthen rampart to thwart attempts to scale it.

### STORMING THE RAMPART

The Gauls used scaling ladders, grappling hooks, and rope in their attempts to breach the palisade. Their sheer numbers gave them hope that they could breach one or more sections of the well-built Roman siege lines.



# BATTLE OF ALESIA

CONFRONTING TWO GALLIC ARMIES, CAESAR SET TO WORK ON A FORT THAT WOULD DIVIDE AND DOOM HIS ENEMY



Written by William Welsh

## FASCINES

The Gauls tossed bundles of sticks into the dry ditch at the base of the rampart to bridge it during an attack.

## NIGHT ATTACK

The besieged Gauls launched a major assault on the Romans' inner siege line. Both Vercingetorix's men and the Gallic relief army attempted night assaults just before dawn in the hope that the darkness would afford them the element of surprise.

## MOAT

As part of their elaborate field fortifications, the Romans diverted water from the rivers on either side of Alesia to fill the outer ditch of the inner siege lines to slow an attack by the Gauls.

Julius Caesar's Germanic horsemen thundered toward the Gallic cavalry formed up on the wide plain. Answering the challenge, the Gallic cavalry rode to meet them in battle. In a swirling melee, the Germans and Gauls fought each other with javelins, spears and swords. The Germans eventually prevailed, and the Gallic horsemen fled the field, leaving the battlefield strewn with their dead. The cavalry encounter was the first blood drawn when a 100,000-strong Gallic relief army arrived to assist 80,000 Gauls at the hilltop town of Alesia.

After five years conquering the Gauls, Caesar faced a widespread rebellion in early 52 BCE led by Vercingetorix, the chief of the Averni tribe. Following several losses to Caesar, Vercingetorix established a fortified encampment in August on the eastern end of the oval-shaped, 150-metre-high (490-foot) limestone plateau. The Gallic commander believed that if a second army were to come to his aid, the two armies would be able to crush the 55,000-strong Roman army. While the besieged Gauls awaited assistance, Caesar built one of the greatest siege works known to history.

When the relief army arrived, it bivouacked to the west of the Romans. Throughout the following day, the relief army constructed the equipment it would need for an assault. That evening the Gauls launched a major assault against the west end of the Roman works, but they failed to break through. During this struggle the Roman commander Marc Antony distinguished himself.

The leaders of the relief army devised a clever ruse. One of them, Vercassivellaunus, would lead a force composed of the fiercest warriors to Mont Rae before daybreak. The following morning, the remaining Gauls would launch a diversionary attack. Once the Romans were heavily engaged, Vercassivellaunus would launch a surprise attack against a gap in the northwest section of the works.

As planned, Vercassivellaunus launched the main attack at midday, catching the Romans by surprise. Thousands of battle-ready Gauls streamed down towards the waiting Roman battlements. To assist the relief force, Vercingetorix launched a co-ordinated attack from within the siege lines.

Pressed from within and without, the Roman army was stretched to breaking point. With the fate of the battle hanging in the balance, Caesar sent his second-in-command, Titus Labienus, with six cohorts to stem the sea of wild Gauls. On his way Labienus gathered another 11 cohorts that he fed into the expanding battle.

The din of battle would have been tremendous - clanging swords mixed with the shouts of attacking troops and the screams of the horribly wounded. But Caesar was not about to be outfoxed. He ordered his Germanic cavalry to sally forth and strike Vercassivellaunus' troops from behind. The counterattack worked and the Gauls quickly fled in disorder. After having made two large-scale attacks, both of which failed, the relief army departed.

The next day, Vercingetorix surrendered to Caesar. Shortly afterwards, all of Gaul submitted to Roman rule. Caesar had campaigned in Gaul to win fame and fortune, and most importantly to gain military experience that would put him on par with his rival Pompey the Great. Alesia served as a magnificent capstone to Caesar's triumphant Gallic campaign.





## Romans

**INFANTRY** 40,000  
**RELIEF** 10,000  
**GALLIC** 5,000



### GAIUS JULIUS CAESAR LEADER

Caesar needed to win a victory to rival the military achievements of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus.

**Strengths** He was a great tactician and had the undying respect of his men. He was confident, determined, and resourceful.

**Weakness** Caesar took a major gamble pitting his highly disciplined, well-trained army against a vastly larger force.



### LEGIO X EQUESTRIS

#### KEY UNIT

Caesar raised, trained, and led the legion, which served with him throughout the Gallic Wars.

**Strengths** The legionnaires fought as a co-ordinated team that held together well under pressure.

**Weakness** The members of the legion were egotistical and expected frequent rewards.

### PILUM

#### KEY WEAPON

The 2m (6.5ft) javelin featured an iron shank. It could be thrown or used as a spear in close-quarters combat.

**Strengths** It was a sturdy, versatile, and proven weapon that was particularly effective against an enemy charge.

**Weakness** Its offensive attributes exceeded its defensive capabilities.



#### 1 MOUNTAIN FORTRESS

Vercingetorix's army encamps outside the town of Alesia on the eastern end of the high plateau and constructs a stone wall to protect the encampment. Sheer cliffs on the north and south serve as natural barriers, but the eastern and western approaches allow access to the plateau.

#### 2 CONSTRUCTION ZONE

Caesar's legionnaires begin constructing inner siege lines to prevent the Gauls from escaping the hilltop town. To protect his men from enemy sorties while they build a section on the plain to the west, Caesar orders his men to dig a trench to prevent hit-and-run attacks that are meant to disrupt the construction.

#### 3 ROMAN ENGINEERING

Over the course of a month, the Romans build a 16-kilometre (ten-mile) inner line to contain Vercingetorix's army and a 22-kilometre (14-mile) outer line to prevent an expected relief army from raising the siege, but a few gaps exist where there are hills or rivers. The Romans establish seven fortified camps on the perimeter and 23 small forts to strengthen the lines.

#### 4 RIDE FOR HELP

Before the Romans complete their siege lines, Vercingetorix sends away his large contingent of cavalry, instructing them to go to their respective tribes and return with all men of military age. They depart through the northwest sector.



## Gauls

**INFANTRY** 80,000  
**RELIEF** 100,000  
**GALLIC** 8,000



## VERCINGETORIX

### LEADER

Realising the Gauls could not defeat the Romans in a pitched battle, he advocated for guerrilla warfare.

**Strengths** He was a courageous warrior and strict disciplinarian.

**Weakness** He was cruel and unmerciful, as shown by his decision to slaughter Roman innocents.



## CAVALRY

### KEY UNIT

The elite horsemen possessed high-quality weapons, including javelins, a spear, a shield, and a sword.

**Strengths** They had high morale and hurled their javelins before they charged home.

**Weakness** They were undisciplined and therefore quick to break and nearly impossible to rally.



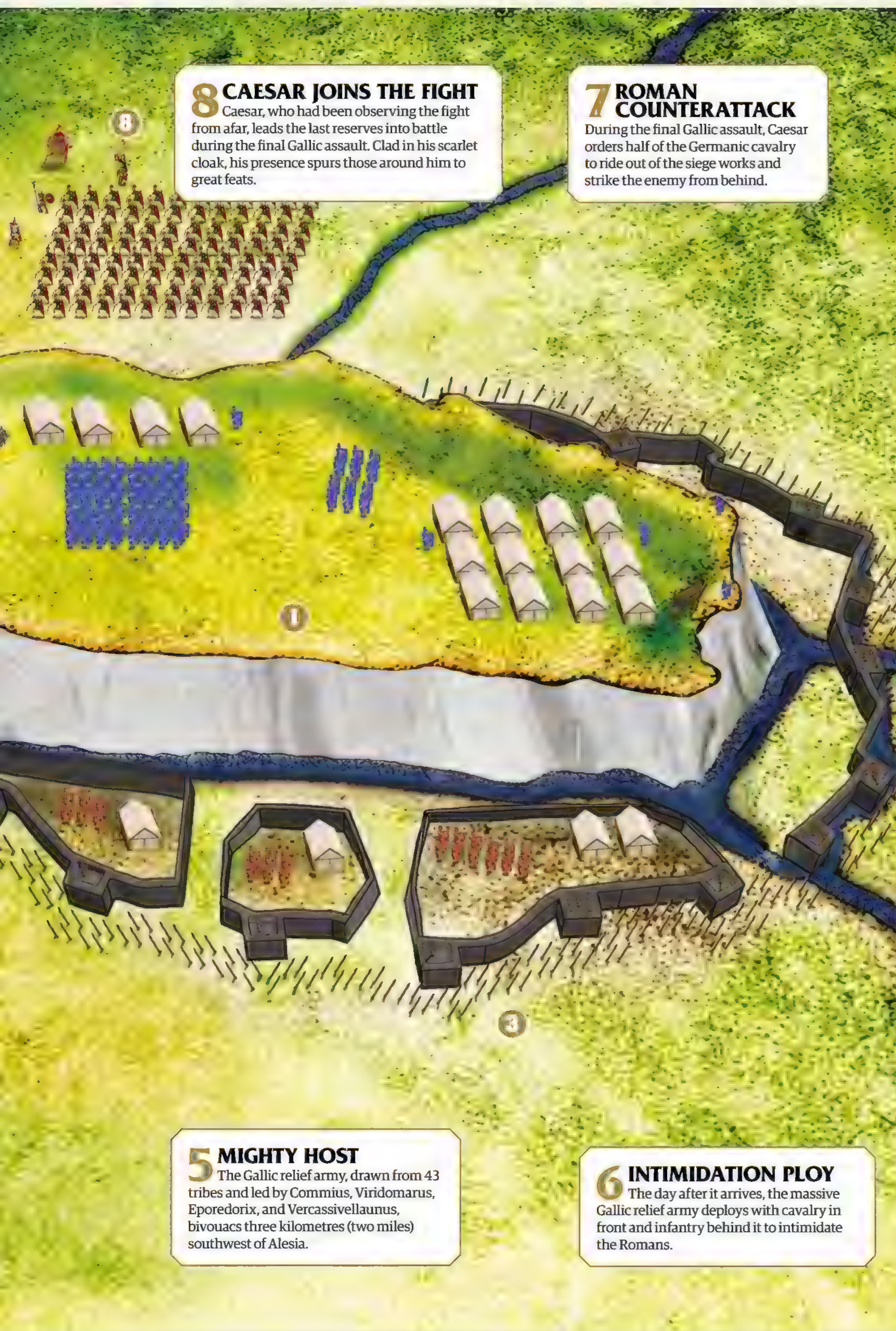
## SLASHING SWORD

### KEY WEAPON

The double-edged, blunt-tipped sword ranged in length from 85–90cm (33–35in) and was worn in a scabbard on the right side.

**Strengths** It was an intimidating and deadly weapon that outclassed the Roman gladius.

**Weakness** This weapon required considerable space to wield effectively in battle.



## 8 CAESAR JOINS THE FIGHT

Caesar, who had been observing the fight from afar, leads the last reserves into battle during the final Gallic assault. Clad in his scarlet cloak, his presence spurs those around him to great feats.

## 7 ROMAN COUNTERATTACK

During the final Gallic assault, Caesar orders half of the Germanic cavalry to ride out of the siege works and strike the enemy from behind.

## 5 MIGHTY HOST

The Gallic relief army, drawn from 43 tribes and led by Commius, Viridomarus, Eporedorix, and Vercassivellaunus, bivouacs three kilometres (two miles) southwest of Alesia.

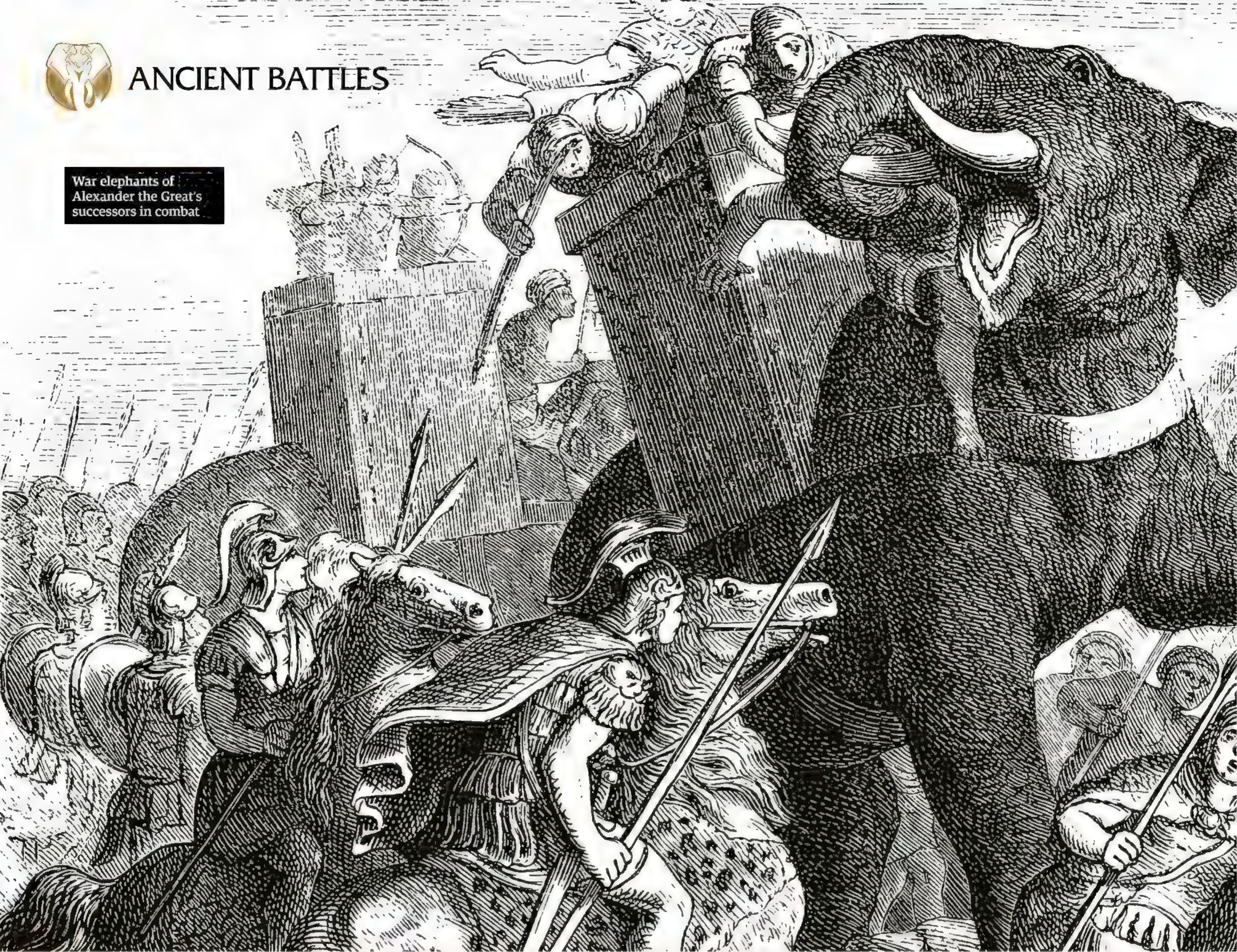
## 6 INTIMIDATION PLOY

The day after it arrives, the massive Gallic relief army deploys with cavalry in front and infantry behind it to intimidate the Romans.





War elephants of  
Alexander the Great's  
successors in combat



# BATTLE OF RAPHIA

**MENACED BY THE MIGHT OF THE  
SELEUCID EMPIRE, PTOLEMY IV  
RACED TO RECRUIT AN ARMY THAT  
COULD SAVE HIS KINGDOM**



Written by

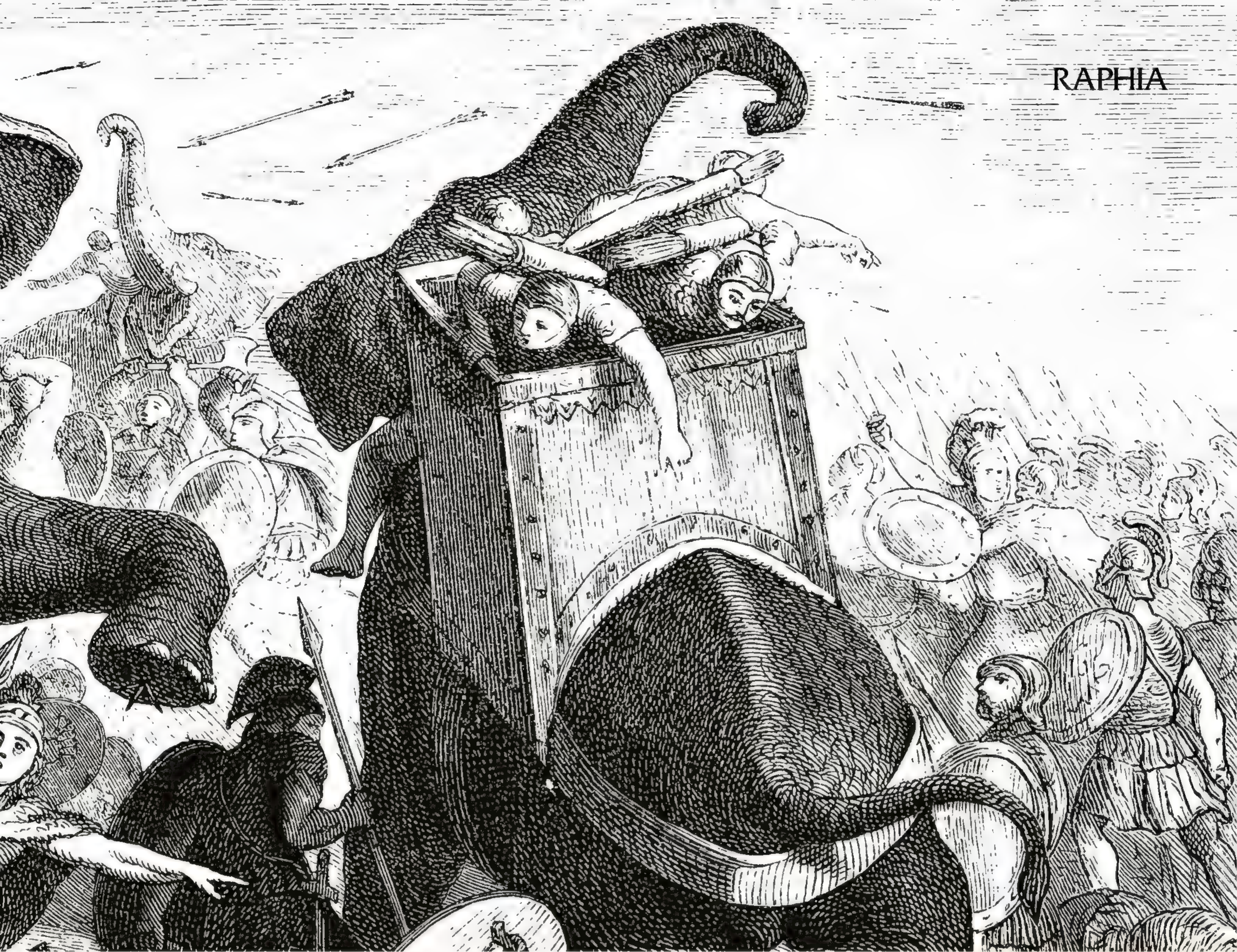
**B**etween 334 and 323 BCE, Alexander the Great of Macedon conquered a gigantic empire that, at its height, would stretch from the Balkans to the frontiers of India and the steppes of Central Asia. Upon his death in Babylon in 323 BCE, Alexander's former generals fell to fighting among themselves for its possession.

The empire was too big for any one man to gain mastery over it, and after years of conflict it was divided unevenly between three main dynastic groups, each one originating with one of Alexander's senior commanders. These were the Diadochoi, or Successors, to the legendary king: Antigonus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.

The Antigonids ruled Macedonia, Greece, and other parts of Europe; the Seleucids held the tremendous eastern domains, including Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran, all the way to western India; and the Ptolemies reigned in Egypt.

The Seleucid king, Antiochus III, newly crowned in 223 BCE and based in Syria, was eager to reassert control over the former eastern possessions of his empire that had slipped from Seleucid grasp over the course of the third century





BCE. Far-off Bactria had broken away in the middle of the century.

In northeastern Iran the Macedonian *satrap* (governor) of the province of Parthia had declared his independence from his Seleucid overlords at around the same time. Not long after, the latter province was occupied by Parni steppe nomads around 238 BCE. These Parni acquired the name of the overrun province of Parthia as their own and founded the Parthian Empire.

The Parthians were a tough and warlike people with excellent cavalry, and their incursion marked a serious recession of Seleucid power in the far east of the empire. This was a decline that Antiochus was determined to reverse, but the Parthian matter would have to wait for a while. More immediately, in 220 BCE, Antiochus put down a rebellious Macedonian aristocrat named Molon, who was the satrap of Media, and then suppressed a powerful Iranian magnate named Artabazanes in northern Iran.

Antiochus' preferred target was, however, the young king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopator. Like the Seleucid monarch, Ptolemy had ascended to his throne only recently, in 221 BCE. By 219 BCE,

Antiochus was back in the west, having returned from his victorious campaigns in the east. But not every threat had been extinguished. Achaeus, a kinsman, was busy plotting a revolt in Asia Minor, but Antiochus was too focused for the time being on Egypt to take direct action against him.

The primary area of contention was Coele Syria, a region of indistinct boundaries haphazardly referred to by ancient writers. In antiquity Coele Syria generally meant the coastal regions that lay between modern Syria and Egypt, or roughly the areas of Phoenicia, and further south, Palestine, as far as the Egyptian frontier. It contained many wealthy port cities and became the focus of great competition between the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt during the third century BCE. In 301 BCE Coele Syria was, by agreement among the Successors to Alexander, to be allotted to Seleucus I Nicator, the founder of the Seleucid dynasty. In actuality, it fell into the possession of Ptolemy I, who occupied it with his own forces.

The Seleucids were intent on retrieving their lost territory, and a series of wars were fought between them and the Ptolemies over Coele Syria. The First Syrian War of 274-271 BCE started with

the invasion of Coele Syria by the Seleucid King Antiochus I Soter (281-261 BCE).

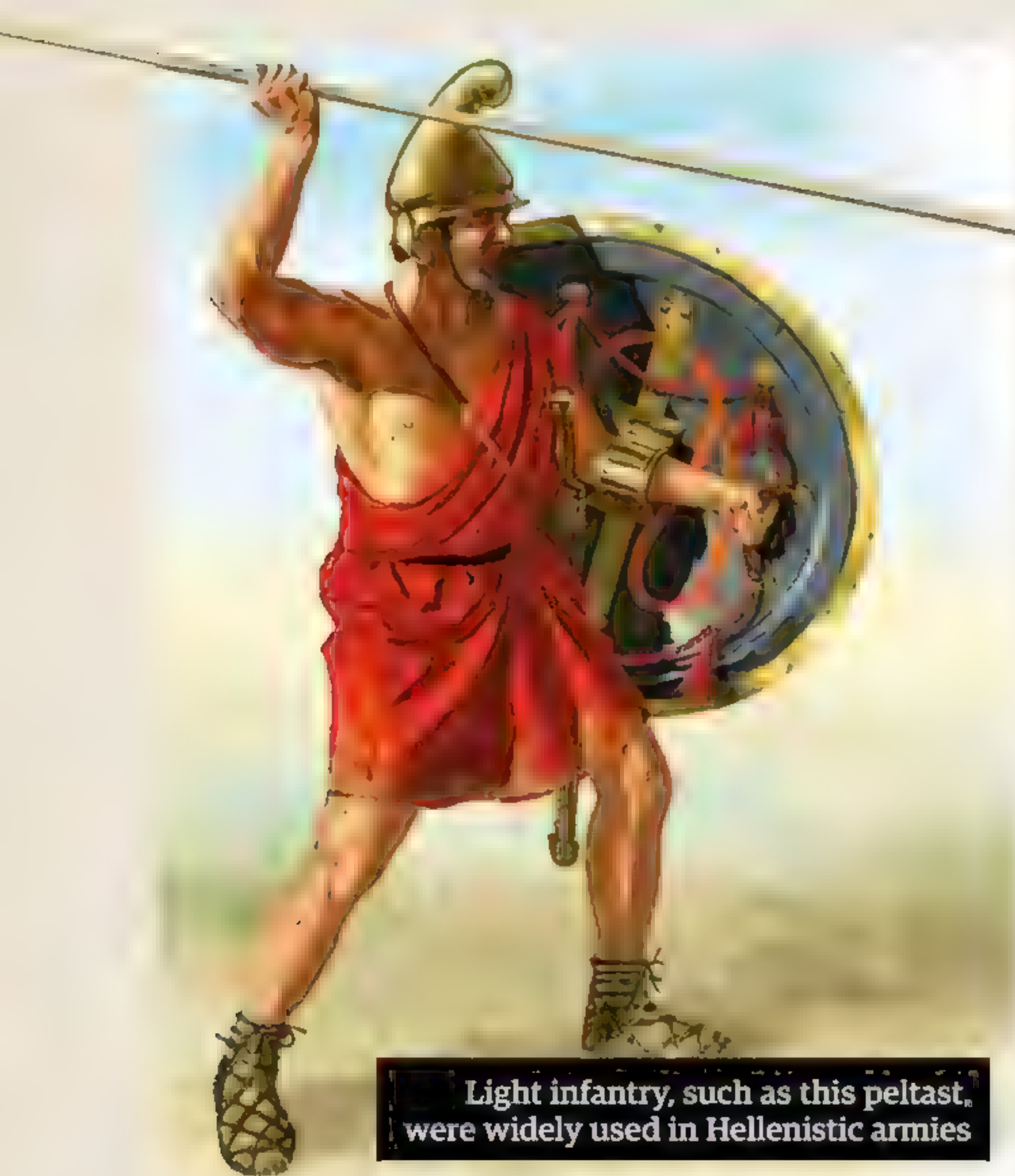
Antiochus made gains initially on land, but Ptolemy II Philadelphus' superior Egyptian fleet seized Coele Syria's port cities on the eastern Mediterranean. The Second Syrian War of 260-255 BCE saw King Antiochus II Theos (261-246 BCE), recapture the port cities that had fallen to the Egyptians in the first war.

In the Third Syrian War of 246-241 BCE, a Ptolemaic army marched all the way to Babylon in Mesopotamia and dispatched the Egyptian navy to take back the port cities of Coele Syria.

Ptolemaic gains also included the capture of lands in Asia Minor, Syria proper, Cyprus, and ports in the Aegean Sea. By the time of young Antiochus III's accession to the Seleucid throne in 223 BCE, the Ptolemaic Empire had reached its greatest territorial extent.

From Antiochus' vantage point in Syria, Ptolemy IV would have appeared an easy mark. The Egyptian king was notable for his licentiousness and inattention to matters of state. Also, as Antiochus would in time learn, Ptolemy had carelessly angered an important man who could





Light infantry, such as this peltast, were widely used in Hellenistic armies

and would do him harm. Theodotus, an Aetolian Greek by birth, held Coele Syria on behalf of Ptolemy as its governor. In 221 BCE, Theodotus had successfully defended the region from an initial incursion made by the recently enthroned Antiochus III, forcing the Seleucid monarch to turn back.

Despite his excellent showing, Theodotus had not been rewarded by Ptolemy. He was instead called to court for a meeting from which he barely escaped execution at his king's ungrateful hands.

Seeing firsthand the dysfunction of the Ptolemaic court made Theodotus reconsider his loyalties. He decided to switch them to Antiochus, to whom he sent a letter proposing to turn over the whole of Coele Syria to him, and that he march south with his army as soon as possible.

Antiochus had begun to make inroads against the Egyptians before this. Beginning in 219 BCE, his first target was the Ptolemy-held city of Seleucia Pieria near to the mouth of the Orontes River. Seleucia Pieria was strategically located. If it remained in Egyptian hands, it would be a threat to any gains that were made elsewhere. If it could be captured, it would be a boon on furthering Seleucid conquests in Coele Syria and help defend their territory as well. The commanders of the city remained firmly loyal to Ptolemy, but several lower-ranking officers were not so adamant. Antiochus swayed them to his side, and when he laid siege to the place they convinced the Ptolemaic commander to surrender.

With Seleucia Pieria in his hands, Antiochus received Theodotus' aforementioned letter. With this new opportunity before him, he temporarily set aside his plan to quash his rebellious uncle Achaeus in Asia Minor and instead tear away a big hunk of the Ptolemaic Empire. Ptolemy IV now had to contend with the consequences of his poor treatment of Theodotus, as well as those that

**“PHALANXES TENDED TO BE RELATIVELY IMMOBILE AND MOST OFTEN BETTER SUITED FOR EITHER DEFENCE OR A DELIBERATE ADVANCE”**

attended the poor governance of his dynasty. In the wake of the successful Third Syrian War, in which the Ptolemaic frontiers had been flung out far from Egypt's borders, the administration of that country had suffered. Even worse, the army had been allowed to decline in prowess and was no match for that of the Seleucids. With Theodotus' treason – the Aetolian general had taken his soldiers over to the Antiochus with him – Coele Syria itself was undefended.

Ptolemy set about rebuilding his army by recruiting soldiers from wherever he could find them. He was aided in this task by his immense wealth, which he deployed liberally to bring soldiers and mercenaries to his standard, and by the talented soldiers of fortune from across the Hellenistic Greek world that he put in charge of their training. These officers had the expertise to weld the raw recruits into genuine fighting men. Chief among these were Polycrates of Argos and Andromachus of Aspendus, who lectured their men on proper military technique. Another, Echecrates of Thessaly, performed an exemplary service in preparing Ptolemy's Greek and mercenary cavalry for combat. Uncharacteristically, Ptolemy, in dire need of men, resorted to inducting 20,000 native Egyptians into the army, something that had hitherto been avoided by the originally Macedonian dynasty.

To gain time for all of this recruiting and training, Ptolemy had his senior ministers, Agathocles and Sosibius, stall for time. Exploiting Antiochus' assumption that Ptolemy IV had no stomach for war, the ministers made it known that a negotiated settlement was possible, despite Antiochus' clear-cut theft of Seleucia Pieria. They met with Seleucid envoys in the Egyptian city of Memphis in the south of the Nile Delta. Meanwhile, feverish Ptolemaic military preparations were taking place out of Seleucid sight in the city of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast throughout 218 BCE.

Antiochus himself allowed matters to drag on for his own reasons. Achaeus, in the north, was still a threat to his rear, and he wanted to have his troops go into winter quarters in Seleucia Pieria. The showdown with Ptolemy IV would have to wait until the next year.

Thus it was not until the spring of 217 BCE that the Seleucid army moved south. Antiochus' host on the march displayed all of the diverse nature of Hellenistic warfare: light infantry from the east of the empire; Macedonian phalangites bearing long pikes; and trumpeting elephants with battle towers on their backs, all marching slowly along the route to Egypt. On his way south Antiochus accepted the submission of several cities and

towns, including Aradus, Philoteria, Scythopolis, and Gaddara. He captured Atabyrium and Rabbatamana. Several higher-ranking Ptolemaic officers defected to him as his awe-inspiring army approached the borders of Egypt.

As Hellenistic successor states of the vaunted Alexander's grand empire, both largely adhered to the military system that the Macedonian conqueror had perfected. At the heart of both the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic armies was the infantry phalanx.

Each soldier, or phalangite, was armed with a sarissa, an extremely long pike that could be as much as seven metres (23 feet) in length. When arrayed in lines, the business end of the weapons held by the men of the first five lines projected ahead of the phalangite of the first line. This meant that the Hellenistic phalanx presented an almost impenetrable hedge of spearpoints.

Phalanxes tended to be relatively immobile and most often better suited for either defence or a deliberate advance. They also required a high degree of training to be effective, since it was no easy thing to manoeuvre with a giant spear in close proximity to other soldiers. Both the Seleucids and the Ptolemies favoured using Macedonian men who were the descendants of Alexander's soldiers who had settled in their empires a century beforehand. It was something of a novelty when Ptolemy IV recruited native Egyptians to serve as phalangites in the run-up to the Raphia campaign.

Both sides staked huge importance on their corps of war elephants. The Seleucids, with their territories abutting India, acquired their animals from that land. A treaty between Seleucus I and Chandragupta Maurya, one of India's greatest kings, called for Chandragupta to provide the Macedonian monarch with no fewer than 500 elephants. Naturally, the Seleucids also monopolised the elephant trade with India for themselves, and the Ptolemies were forced to look elsewhere, organising elephant-catching expeditions in the lands of the Horn of Africa. Animals incorporated into the Egyptian army were found in Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia.

The elephants of both empires were topped with fighting towers that could accommodate up to four men. These might be armed with the sarissa, the long pike that equipped the infantrymen, or with bows. Shields were often hung from the sides of the towers. In battle the men bearing sarissas would jab at opposing elephants or their riders.

The elephant itself would be covered in a coat of bronze scale armour hung over the back and flanks of the beast. It was also bedecked in coloured cloth. Its head was protected by a metal



plate adorned with upright feathers. To prevent an enemy from hamstringing the animal, its legs were encircled with laminated bands of bronze.

In one profound way, the two species of elephants, Indian (*Elephas maximus*) and African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), differed, and this would be of crucial importance at Raphia. The African forest elephant was utterly unwilling to close with its Indian cousin. It was a significantly smaller animal, standing around two to 2.5 metres (seven to eight feet) in height as opposed to roughly three metres (ten feet) for the Indian elephant. It should be borne in mind also that the African forest elephant is not the same creature as the better-known African bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), which at up to four metres (13 feet) tall is considerably larger than its Indian cousin but also completely untameable.

The African forest elephant's reluctance to fight the Indian was understandable given the size disparity. Elephants are intelligent creatures and, at root, unwarlike. They have to be extensively trained to engage in combat. The forest elephants would readily have understood the edge held by

the Indian opponents. This meant that in any confrontation, the African forest elephants would be nearly useless to the Ptolemies.

Antiochus reached Gaza while Ptolemy had marched out from Alexandria with his reborn army and made his camp at Raphia, the modern Rafah. Antiochus next moved his army closer to Raphia, making another camp a little over a mile distant from that of the Egyptians. A few days afterward, Antiochus again moved, bringing his army to a new encampment around a kilometre (0.6 miles) from that of Ptolemy. Five days of skirmishing ensued, after which both kings were finally willing to risk a contest of strength and formed their huge armies up for battle.

The battle initially went in favour of Antiochus. Ptolemy's African forest elephants would not engage in combat with the larger Indian elephants and this, combined with a cavalry charge by the Seleucid right wing, led to the disintegration of the Egyptian left wing. Ironically, this collapse ultimately drew Antiochus too far from the battlefield to have any more impact on the fighting. While he was away, the resourceful

Echecrates of Thessaly led the Ptolemaic right-wing cavalry in a bold and successful charge against the Seleucid left wing. Meanwhile, the raw Egyptian phalangites had proved their mettle and defeated the Seleucid phalanx in front of them in the centre of the field. Upon Antiochus' return, there was nothing he could do to retrieve the situation, and he retreated with his army to Gaza.

Antiochus III had lost a battle that he would have won had he not allowed himself to get carried away in the rush of success in the opening phase of the fighting. His losses were very heavy.

Some 10,000 infantrymen were killed and 300 horsemen were slain. Around 4,000 others were made prisoners of the Egyptians. Ptolemy suffered lighter losses: 1,500 infantrymen perished along with 700 cavalrymen and 16 elephants. With the notable exception of Seleucia Pieria, Antiochus had to relinquish all of the gains he had made in the campaign before, but he would have another chance against Egypt during the Fifth Syrian War of 202-198 BCE. At the Battle of Panium in 200 BCE, Antiochus crushed the Egyptians and gained control of Coele Syria and swathes of Asia Minor.







## Seleucid Empire

**INFANTRY** 62,000  
**CAVALRY** 6,000  
**ELEPHANTS (INDIAN)**  
1,100



## ANTIOCHUS III

### LEADER

Young Antiochus III was determined to restore the empire of his forefathers to glory. His main opponent would be Ptolemy IV, Pharaoh of Egypt.

**Strength** Brave and determined.

**Weakness** Youthful and inexperienced.



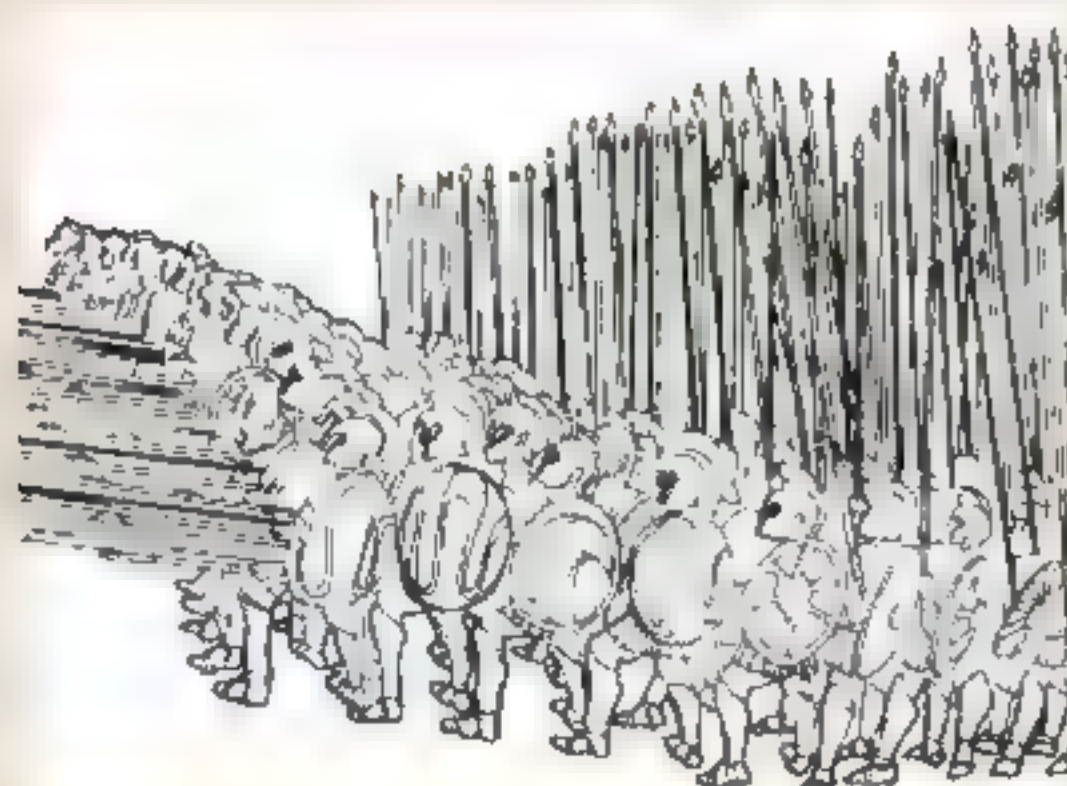
## INDIAN ELEPHANTS

### KEY UNIT

The Indian elephants of the Seleucid army were far bigger and tougher than the African forest elephants of the Egyptians.

**Strengths** Strong and big.

**Weakness** Elephants could become unruly if wounded.



## SARISSA

### KEY WEAPON

The sarissa, a long pike, was the primary weapon of the phalangites of the Seleucid phalanx.

**Strengths** Long reach.

**Weakness** The sarissa-armed phalanx was hard to move.

## 1 BATTLE LINES DRAWN

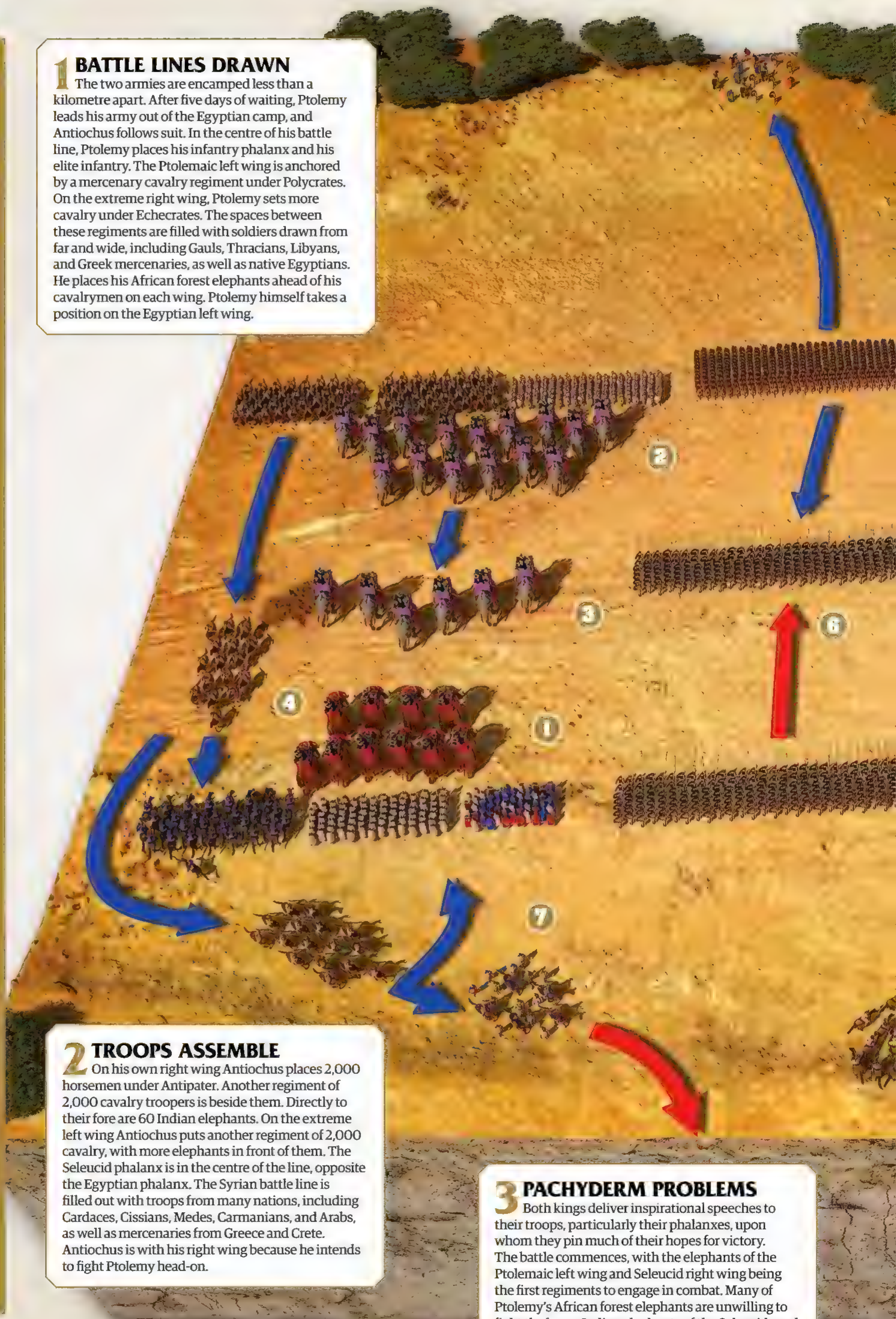
The two armies are encamped less than a kilometre apart. After five days of waiting, Ptolemy leads his army out of the Egyptian camp, and Antiochus follows suit. In the centre of his battle line, Ptolemy places his infantry phalanx and his elite infantry. The Ptolemaic left wing is anchored by a mercenary cavalry regiment under Polycrates. On the extreme right wing, Ptolemy sets more cavalry under Echechrates. The spaces between these regiments are filled with soldiers drawn from far and wide, including Gauls, Thracians, Libyans, and Greek mercenaries, as well as native Egyptians. He places his African forest elephants ahead of his cavalymen on each wing. Ptolemy himself takes a position on the Egyptian left wing.

## 2 TROOPS ASSEMBLE

On his own right wing Antiochus places 2,000 horsemen under Antipater. Another regiment of 2,000 cavalry troopers is beside them. Directly to their fore are 60 Indian elephants. On the extreme left wing Antiochus puts another regiment of 2,000 cavalry, with more elephants in front of them. The Seleucid phalanx is in the centre of the line, opposite the Egyptian phalanx. The Syrian battle line is filled out with troops from many nations, including Cardaces, Cissians, Medes, Carmanians, and Arabs, as well as mercenaries from Greece and Crete. Antiochus is with his right wing because he intends to fight Ptolemy head-on.

## 3 PACHYDERM PROBLEMS

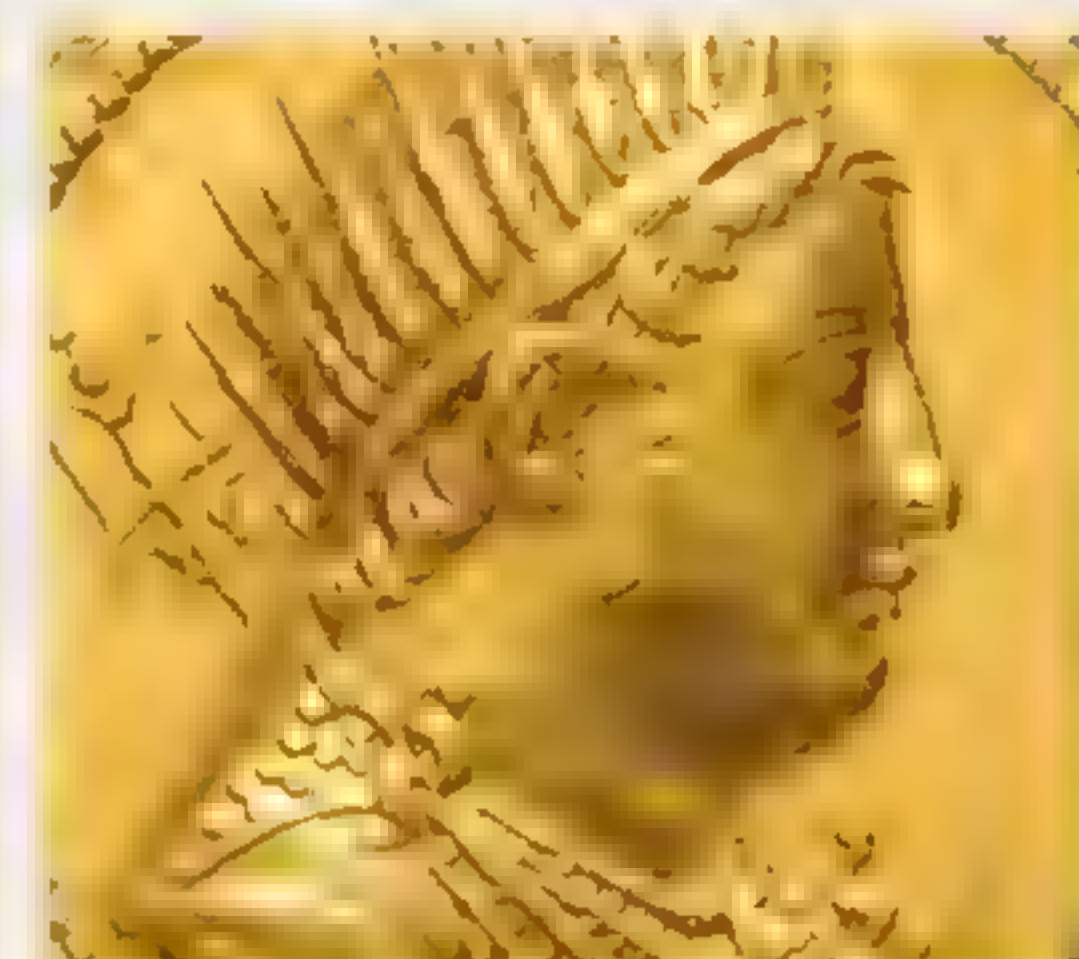
Both kings deliver inspirational speeches to their troops, particularly their phalanxes, upon whom they pin much of their hopes for victory. The battle commences, with the elephants of the Ptolemaic left wing and Seleucid right wing being the first regiments to engage in combat. Many of Ptolemy's African forest elephants are unwilling to fight the larger Indian elephants of the Seleucids and flee. Ptolemy's Royal Guard cavalry is compelled to retreat along with them.





## Ptolemaic Egypt

**INFANTRY** 70,000  
**CAVALRY** 5,000  
**ELEPHANTS**  
**(AFRICAN FOREST)** 73



### PTOLEMY IV

#### LEADER

Young Ptolemy IV led a debauched lifestyle but managed to rebuild the Egyptian army when Antiochus' intentions became clear.

**Strengths** Reacted quickly when the Seleucid threat became apparent.

**Weakness** Young and paid too little attention to statecraft.



### ECHECRATES' CAVALRY

#### KEY UNIT

The right wing cavalry under Echebrates of Thessaly won the battle for Ptolemy with a timely charge against the Seleucid left wing.

**Strengths** Well-trained and daring.

**Weakness** Had trouble charging prepared infantry.



### AFRICAN FOREST ELEPHANTS

#### KEY WEAPON

The African forest elephants refused to take on their Indian counterparts at Raphia.

**Strengths** Strong and intelligent.

**Weakness** Timid in the face of the Indian elephants.

### 7 VICTORY ACHIEVED

Antiochus, believing himself victorious, is far away when one of his officers points to the battlefield left far behind. A dust cloud can be seen heading toward the Syrian camp. This can only mean that the Seleucids are losing the battle! The king hurries back with his Royal Squadron but only arrives in time to find his men in pell-mell flight. The battle is over. Ptolemy has won a great victory and gains possession of Raphia.

### 6 PUSHING BACK

In the centre of the battle line, the infantry phalanxes, up until now not engaged, clash with one another. The Egyptians have the better of the fighting and push Antiochus' best troops backwards.

### 5 MERCENARIES ATTACK

On the other side of the field the Egyptian army is faring much better. The Ptolemaic commander, Echebrates, sees that his own elephants are refusing to clash with the bigger Seleucid animals. He gives up on them and orders his Greek mercenaries to attack the Seleucids in front of them while he leads a cavalry charge that flanks the enemy's elephants. He descends upon the rear of the Seleucid cavalry on the Syrian left wing. The Seleucids here are routed and their left begins to collapse.

### 4 CAVALRY DRIVEN BACK

Antiochus circles around the retreating enemy and strikes the Ptolemaic cavalry on its left wing while his Greek mercenary peltasts mount an attack on Ptolemy's own peltasts, who have become disordered by the retreating elephants. These are driven back. Antiochus drives off the Egyptian cavalry and sets off in headlong pursuit of the fleeing horsemen. He ends up far distant from the rest of the fighting.





# BATTLE OF THE CATALAUNIAN PLAINS

IN THE SUMMER OF 451 CE, WESTERN EUROPE STOOD ON A PRECIPICE. COULD THE HORDES OF ATILA BE HALTED, OR WOULD GAUL BECOME THE LATEST HUNNIC CONQUEST?

## THEODORIC

The leader of the Visigoths agreed to an alliance with the Romans in the face of the threat from the Huns, who were targeting the Visigoth's homeland of Gaul. Ultimately, Theodoric lost his life in the battle.





# THE CATALAUNIAN PLAINS

**T**he Battle of the Catalaunian Plains (or the Battle of Châlons, as it is sometimes referred to) played host to a skirmish between two opponents experiencing varying fortunes. On one side was the Roman Empire, a once-mighty force on the wane in the wake of constant assaults courtesy of increasingly powerful tribes from across Europe. On the other was one of the chief perpetrators of said attacks: Attila the Hun.

Known as 'the scourge of God', Attila and his Huns were renowned for the manner in which they swept through the Eastern Roman Empire, laying waste to all in their path, indiscriminate of age, race, or rank. And they were looking for a new target, ultimately settling on Gaul. Although nominally counted as part of the Roman Empire, in actuality it was largely controlled by the Visigoths, who found themselves under threat from Attila. The barbarian rampaged through Gaul, with cities like Cologne, Mainz, Metz, Strasbourg, and Rheims falling before the onslaught. He then lay siege to Orleans.

But the Romans had as their leader a man capable of facing off with the mighty Attila in battle. Aetius was, by equal measures, a warrior and politician having won numerous battles as a general, and served as chief political adviser to Valentinian III, the emperor of the Western Roman Empire. Having spent large parts of his youth growing up with Visigoths and even the Huns, he knew their ways and habits. This experience, combined with his political and military nous, was to prove vital in not only defeating the latter but in persuading the former to form an alliance with the Roman Empire. Thus, Aetius and his troops, along with an alliance of Visigoths led by King Theodoric I and groups of Alans and Burgundians, made for Orleans.

As it turned out, they made it just in time, arriving on 14 June with Orleans on the verge of surrender. Despite the fact that his forces greatly outnumbered the Roman coalition, Attila ordered his troops to retreat in good order, preferring to face them in open battle rather than the confines of the city. Making camp near Châlons, he waited

until the cover of darkness. All the while Aetius and his force remained in battle formation. On 20 June, the fighting commenced.

The battle was one of the bloodiest of that age. Initially Attila took the upper hand, ploughing through the soft centre of the Alans (purposefully placed there due to their unreliability), but the Romans and Visigoths returned fire by attacking the flanks, turning the tide. With light returning and his life at risk, Attila again withdrew. Exact numbers of the dead (Theodoric among them) are unknown, although some sources have the figure as high as 200,000-300,000.

Faced with the chance to wipe out the Huns, Aetius stayed his hand. This has been attributed to the fact that the existence of a common foe in the Huns was the only reason Rome's alliance with the Visigoths held, which they still needed to safeguard against further attacks from the Vandals in the south (who themselves had first mooted the idea of invading Gaul to Attila). The Huns would return to ravage Italy, but for now the Eastern Roman Empire was secured.

## ROMANS

The word 'Roman' may inspire images of military greatness, but in reality the Roman Empire was a shadow of its former self by this point. Without the aid of the Visigoths and other tribes, Gaul would certainly have fallen.

## THE BATTLE

With much of the battle taking place under the cover of darkness, events took a turn for the chaotic, with many of the combatants losing track of who was fighting who.

## CASUALTIES

To this day, no one knows the number of fighters on each side - or the amount of casualties, for that matter. Reports from the time talk of hundreds of thousands of dead, although there is no way to verify this.





## Romans

**TROOPS** 50-80,000



### AETIUS

#### LEADER

A warrior and politician, Aetius was hugely popular, referred to as the 'last of the Romans'.

**Strengths** Tactically savvy and a strong warrior.

**Weakness** Outnumbered by the Hunnic forces.



### VISIGOTH CAVALRY

#### KEY UNIT

A vital component of the Roman alliance, they would prove to be decisive in the battle ahead.

**Strengths** Strong and very difficult to cut down.

**Weakness** Could easily trample their own men.

### HASTA

#### KEY WEAPON

A cross between a lance and a spear, the hasta was just one of many weapons employed by the Roman soldiers.

**Strengths** Useful for fending off assaults by cavalry.

**Weakness** Could be unwieldy in close-quarters combat.



### 1 ATILA AND HIS TROOPS WITHDRAW TO HIS CIRCLE

Seeing the arrival of the Roman/Visigoth alliance, Attila orders his troops to return to the countryside, setting camp near the town of Châlons. Here, he remains inactive in his wagon circle; all the while Aetius and his forces wait in battle formation.

### 2 ATILA ATTACKS

Attila attacks through the centre with his Huns, where Aetius has intentionally placed the weakest part of his troops, the Alan tribe. The resulting cavalry charge pushes the Alans, led by King Sangiban (who had previously tried to negotiate a surrender with the Huns while Orleans was under siege) back, with Attila following on in pursuit.

### 3 AETIUS COUNTER-ATTACKS

Aetius had kept the bulk of his strength on the flanks, commanding his Roman troops on the left, with Theodoric leading the Visigoths on the right. After Attila's initial assault, the Romans press the attack, attempting to prevent Attila from retreating back to his wagons. Despite assaulting Attila's forces, they lack the numbers to fully overwhelm the Huns.

### 4 THE VISIGOTHS STRIKE

With the battle continuing well into the night, the fighting becomes increasingly desperate. Having initially been held up by strong resistance from the Huns, the Visigoths assault the flanks. Combined with the Roman assault, this turns the tide of the battle in Aetius' favour, with the Huns being pressed on both flanks and hemmed in and thereby denied the space that they need to fight.

### 5 THEODORIC IS KILLED

Tragedy strikes for the Visigoths. During the assault, Theodoric is unhorsed before being trampled and killed by his own men. This is a blow for Aetius, with his strongest ally dead.





# THE CATALAUNIAN PLAINS



**6 THE VISIGOTHS FIGHT ON**  
Despite the loss of their king and leader, the Visigoths fight on with renewed vigour, led by the fallen Theodoric's son, Thorismund. Thirsty for revenge, Thorismund leads a cavalry charge into the midst of Attila's forces, inflicting huge numbers of casualties in the process.

**7 CHAOS REIGNS**  
With the Sun having set, there is much confusion, as both forces lose track of who is fighting who. In one instance, Thorismund mistakes the Huns for his own men and is nearly killed himself as a result.

**8 ATILA RETREATS**  
Seeing that the tide of battle has turned against him, and not willing to risk further losses, Attila retreats with his forces to his wagon circle, with his archers covering the retreating troops.

**9 AETIUS STAYS HIS HAND**  
Despite having the opportunity to destroy the Huns once and for all, after a night of deliberation, Aetius opts against further pursuing the Huns. The likely reason for this is that the Huns provided a common foe for the Romans and Visigoths to unite behind, and with Theodoric dead, Aetius needed to be sure that he could count on the support of the Visigoths.

**10 THE HUNS MAKE THEIR EXIT**  
With Aetius unwilling to press the assault, Attila takes his troops beyond the Rhine, making an effective retreat. He would later recover and return to make trouble for the Roman Empire, but in the meantime its future was secure.

## Huns

**TROOPS** 50-80,000



## ATTILA

### LEADER

One of the most feared military leaders of all time, he was determined to invade Gaul.

**Strengths** A cunning and strong warrior, commanding a huge force behind him.

**Weakness** Tactically outmanoeuvred by Aetius.



## HUNS

### KEY UNIT

One of the most formidable – and feared – tribes in Europe, wherever they went they left destruction in their wake.

**Strengths** Brave and fearless warriors in battle.

**Weakness** Gung-ho nature left them liable to be caught out tactically.

## BOW AND ARROW

### KEY WEAPON

Used to great effect to cover the Hun retreat, they were especially lethal against any mounted cavalry.

**Strengths** Possesses a good range and lethal in numbers.

**Weakness** Not as effective in close-quarters combat.

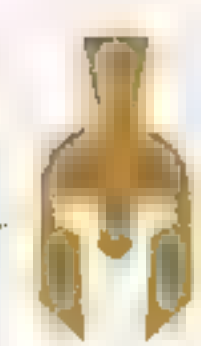






# THE ASSYRIAN WAR MACHINE

**DISCOVER THE GREATEST ARMY OF THE IRON AGE MIDDLE EAST AND HOW IT ALMOST CAPTURED JERUSALEM**



**T**he Assyrian Empire originated on the upper Tigris River between the cities of Nimrud, Nineveh, and Ashur in what is now known as the northwest of Iraq. The geo-strategic position of its mainland was somewhat precarious, because the area lacked wood and usable stone for construction purposes, as well as iron ore for the production of weapons or steppes on which to breed horses. The topography provided no natural barriers for invaders, meaning if Assyria wanted to survive, it had to conquer its neighbours.

In the 9th century BCE, it expanded its territory extensively and emerged as the dominant power of the Middle East. A hundred years later, Tiglath-Pileser III seized the Assyrian crown and killed the royal family. An excellent administrative and military reformer, he was also a gifted general who conquered most of the Middle East.

The Assyrian army was the major instrument facilitating this expansion. Tiglath-Pileser reformed the army, providing it with a strong backbone of professional, full-time soldiers supported by contingents from conquered realms. Commanding a standing army, the Assyrians were able to wage war all year long and to field a force of 150,000 to 200,000 soldiers. This army was the first to be mainly equipped with iron weapons

and armour. Iron metallurgy had probably been invented by the Hittites around 1300 BCE and had spread in the following centuries. Compared with bronze, iron was a superior material because cold forging created stronger and more reliable arms.

A few centuries later, the discovery of tempering made iron the best material for arms production. The widespread availability of iron ore decreased production costs, making it even more attractive. Even minor powers were able to muster and equip formidable armies with affordable weapons. It's no wonder that wars then became much more frequent, and the Assyrians were the first to fully exploit the possibilities of this new Iron Age.

The ancient Assyrians fielded a complex combined-arms fighting force consisting of infantry, chariots, cavalry, sappers, and auxiliaries. The king acted as supreme commander and usually led the campaigns. The heavy infantrymen provided the bulk of the army, supported by archers, slingers, and shield bearers. The archers were considered as particularly dangerous because their iron arrowheads easily penetrated enemy armour, while the invention of the quiver increased their shot frequency immensely.

Cavalry and war chariots formed elite forces. Chariots were manned by a driver, an archer, and a shield bearer. If the terrain was suitable

they were deployed as shock troops against the enemy's infantry ranks. When mounted archers were introduced in the 9th century BCE the cavalry became increasingly important.

The difficult terrain of the Levant reduced the efficiency of these chariots, paving the way for the cavalry as the new heart of the Assyrian offence. In the 7th century BCE, the cavalry had developed into a heavily armed and protected combat troop. The horses were of high strategic value, which is why the Assyrians invested a lot of effort and resources into breeding, feeding, and training them.

In open battles, the heavy infantry - joined by archers, slingers, and shield bearers - took the centre of the Assyrian line, with cavalry and chariot forces deployed at the flanks. The battle formation was more than 2,000 metres (6,560 feet) long and almost 100 metres (330 feet) deep. The archers and slingers usually opened the battle with long-range shots. Afterwards, the chariots and cavalry pushed forward; the chariots were supposed to crash through the enemy's lines, while the cavalry was to exploit the breaches and roll up the enemy. Afterwards, the infantry would deal the final blow.

These armies also excelled in the art of siege warfare. A typical siege began with a complete





The might of the Assyrian and Egyptian armies were smashed by Babylonia at the Battle of Carchemish

## “THE ASSYRIANS WERE ABLE TO WAGE WAR ALL YEAR LONG AND TO FIELD A FORCE OF 150,000 TO 200,000 SOLDIERS”

lockdown of the targeted city, then the generals examined the defence systems and searched for weak spots - usually the city gates. The besieger first prepared huge earth ramps at the identified points to overcome the glacis, and then put the siege engines to work. Mounted on wheels, these consisted of a battering ram with an iron pike and a siege tower, the top of which was covered by hides that were kept wet in order to prevent the tower from catching fire. The tower was manned by archers bombarding the walls with arrows.

Psychosocial warfare also played a part: the Assyrians were infamous for their brutality after capturing a defiant city. This meant that even the sight of an Assyrian army taking position in front of a city sufficed to make its inhabitants surrender. To control the lands he conquered, King Tiglath-Pileser III introduced mass deportation as a regular policy, thereby removing the enemy's elite - the most likely to instigate a rebellion. Areas that had been politically decapitated in such a way were easier to rule.

### THE HEBREW KINGDOMS

In the 9th century BCE, the Assyrian Empire became a regional great power of the Middle East and expanded towards the Levant. King Shalmaneser III (859-824 BCE) conducted 21 campaigns during his reign of 35 years, establishing Assyrian dominance from Babylon to the coast of the Mediterranean. At that time, the small city-states and kingdoms of the Levant experienced a period of political power and economic wealth. Among those Levantine realms were the Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the land of today's state of Israel. Under the legendary rule of kings David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE a unified kingdom had formed. However, at the end of the century they separated: Israel in the north with its capital, Samaria (today's Sebastiya in the West Bank), was ruled by changing dynasties, whereas Judah in the south was controlled from Jerusalem by the descendants of David.

Most of the time, both kingdoms were fighting each other, with Israel usually dominating due to a

larger population and better agricultural conditions than Judah. But both kingdoms prospered in the 9th century, and the territorial expansion of the Assyrians was an existential threat looming over the Levant. A military confrontation remained an inevitability - it was simply a case of when.

Israel and Judah both probably commanded small standing armies, however, their methods of recruitment and organisation are obscure. It's likely the armies mainly consisted of infantry supported by a limited number of chariots and cavalry units. The infantry were armed with javelins, swords, and shields and accompanied by archers and slingers.

For small kingdoms like Israel and Judah, it was essential to form military alliances against great powers - they rarely conducted major offensive campaigns by themselves. Most military activities focused on the preparation for sieges and the construction of fortifications. First and foremost, securing the water supply was essential to survival. Springs often originated outside the city walls, making the construction of elaborate water systems essential. The Israelites and Judeans dug immense tunnel systems to secure their access to springs. Visitors to the sites of Megiddo, Hazor, and Jerusalem (in today's Israel) have long marvelled at the effort and the advanced engineering skills that





## THE SOURCES

The Old Testament (in particular the books Kings and Chronicles) tells the history of the Hebrew Kingdoms of Israel and Judah from the 10th to the 7th century BCE. Although the story is a little biased - especially when it comes to the enemies of the Hebrews - it still remains a valuable source from the period.

Assyrian sources present us with the other side of the story. There are numerous written records that keep much closer to the events than the Bible. The annals of the kings and the epigrams (lists of important Assyrian officers) provide specific information about rulers and events. However, these sources were mainly produced as Assyrian propaganda and are therefore far from unbiased in their account.

Finally, archaeology adds important insights as well as the traces of war and destruction are still visible today. The excavation of ancient cities like Megiddo, Hazor, and Lachish in modern-day Israel bring back to life the devastation of Assyrian siege warfare. Findings of weapons, fortifications, and the traces of siege engines help us to understand the events that took place 2,700 years ago. A frieze depicting the Assyrian capture of the Judean city of Lachish in 701 BCE, which was unearthed in the Assyrian capital, Nimrud, presents a unique opportunity to study not only warfare techniques but the appearance of soldiers and weapons as well.



Right: The Jerusalem Prism (shown in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem) contains Sennacherib's annals written in Akkadian.

the ancient people of the cities invested in those infrastructure projects.

The city walls, constructed of worked ashlar blocks (or mud bricks dating back to the Bronze Age) on a steep artificial mound (glacis) were also an important factor. In the early Iron Age they had consisted of nothing more than the out-facing walls of private dwellings. In the 10th century, however, casemate walls prevailed - a kind of rampart that had two parallel walls with intersections. The space between the outer and inner walls accommodated soldiers or supplies during peacetime. During a siege, the defenders filled this with earth to strengthen the rampart. Since the 9th century BCE, massive walls with towers and bastions had become common.

This innovative defence design was probably inspired by advances in siege techniques. Before the appearance of the Assyrians in the Levant, attackers had captured cities or strongholds through ladder assaults - with the defenders on their walls enjoying a tactical advantage. As long as a city or a fortress had enough supplies in store, the defenders could simply wait until the attackers ran out of supplies or patience.

However, the Assyrians changed siege warfare fundamentally through the introduction of new weapon systems and tactics. Straight walls provided the ideal target for the Assyrian tactics, whereas ramparts with advancing towers and battlements presented less vulnerable attack points and gave the defenders the opportunity to take the attackers down in a lethal crossfire.

## THE ASSYRIAN ATTACK ON THE LEVANT

Facing the Assyrian threat, 11 Levantine kingdoms formed a defensive alliance. In 853 BCE, Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III faced the coalition in the famous Battle of Qarqar (today's Tell Qarqur) at the shore of the Orontes River in northwestern Syria - one of the biggest battles ever fought at the time. He led an army of 70,000 men to the battlefield, including 1,200 cavalrymen and 4,000 chariots.

The anti-Assyrian alliance had mustered a formidable force as well. Contemporary sources tell the story of a bloody fight with thousands of soldiers dead. Assyrian accounts present Shalmaneser as the victor, a contentious claim that probably resulted from Assyrian propaganda, because Shalmaneser was hesitating over moving further south for years. It took him three more attempts to break the anti-Assyrian alliance and conquer the southern Levant in the 840s BCE. In the end, internal struggles between the Levantine allies brought the coalition down, giving the Assyrians a golden chance to fight the kingdoms one by one.

The following 150 years were characterised by conflicts between the kingdoms of the Levant

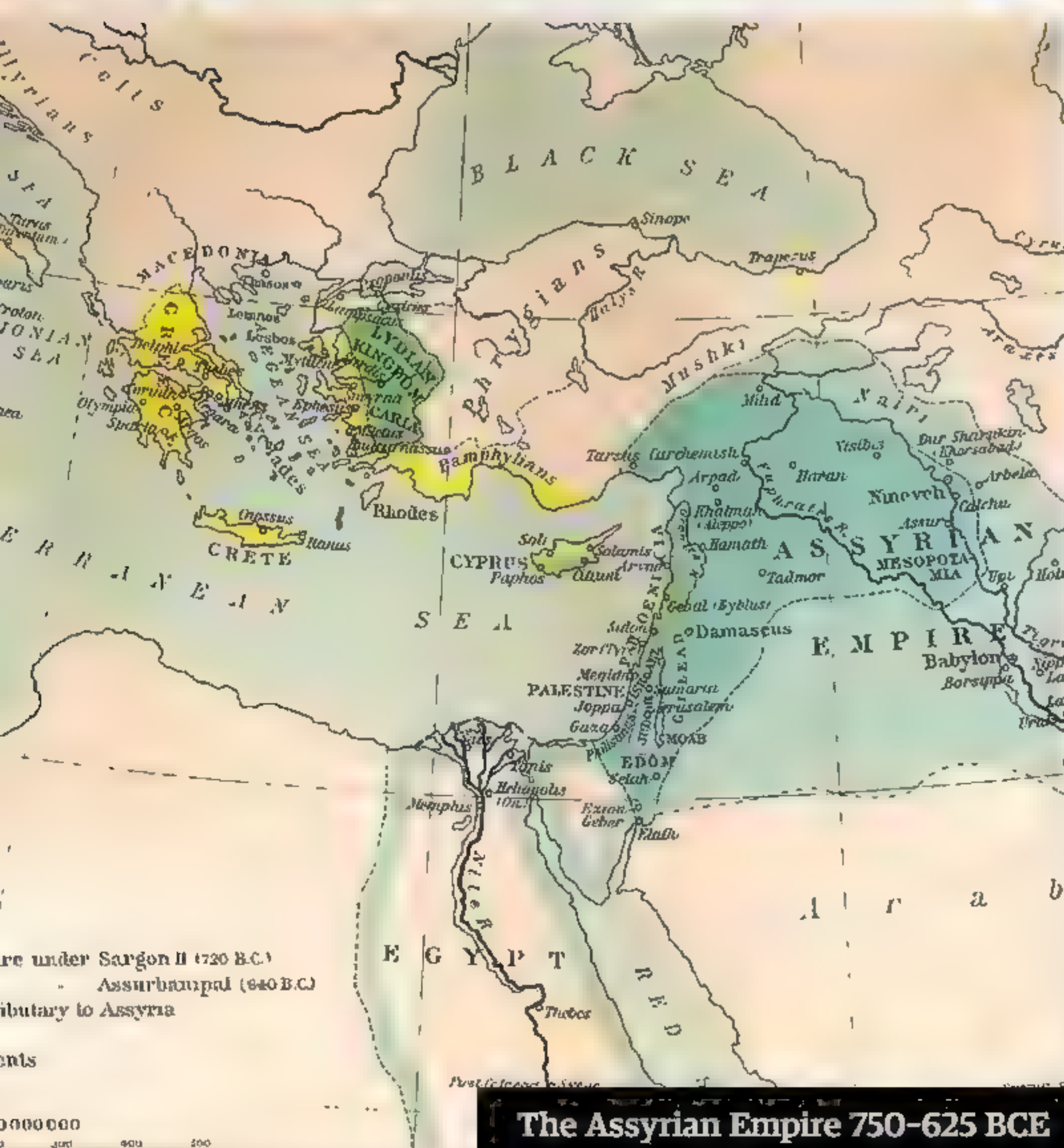


and rebellions against the Assyrian hegemon. Israel and Judah survived as Assyrian vassals for the time being. Eventually, Israel pushed its luck too far by trying to play the regional great powers off against each other, namely Assyria and Egypt. The Assyrians didn't hesitate and crushed Israel in 722-21 BCE. To neutralise a threat in a strategically important buffer area between Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Assyrians deported tens of thousands of inhabitants and resettled people from other parts of the empire. The kingdom of Israel was no more.

The southern Hebrew kingdom, Judah, ruled by King Hezekiah (725-698 BCE), did not follow Israel into the rebellion and was now rewarded by years of political stability, prosperity, and even territorial expansion. When King Sargon II of Assyria died in 705 BCE, Hezekiah made a crucial mistake when he joined in with the series of rebellions breaking out in every corner of the Assyrian Empire. As soon as the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib (705-681 BCE), consolidated his position at home, he set his army in motion towards the Levant.

## SIEGES OF LACHISH AND JERUSALEM

Sennacherib's campaign against the southern Levant in 701 BCE is one of the most well-documented military events of the Iron Age. Not only can historians rely on the annals of the Assyrian king and the biblical account - there are also plenty of archaeological remains.



The Assyrian Empire 750-625 BCE





Paul Ruben's *The Defeat of Sennacherib* follows the Biblical account: God's angel saved Jerusalem

Hezekiah prepared for the consequences of his decisions. He knew that Sennacherib would come for him and that his forces would not stand a chance in an open battle. He had his cities and strongholds readied for protracted sieges – above all the capital of his kingdom, Jerusalem. He extended the city wall and secured the water supply by constructing a 550-metre (1,800-foot)-long tunnel that diverted the water from Jerusalem's only spring, the Gihon, to a huge pool inside the city.

Sennacherib pushed forwards along the Mediterranean coast and swept away any resistance. An increasing number of cities surrendered before it came to a fight. Eventually, Sennacherib turned towards Judah and lay siege to the heavily fortified city of Lachish. Archaeological excavations revealed a 50- to 60-metre (164-197 foot)-long ramp, the Assyrians having piled up 19,000 tons of soil to create this pathway for their siege engines. Mass graves, hundreds of arrowheads and sling stones, and traces of a horrific fire in the city bear witness to the bloody battle and the destruction it caused. The Battle of Lachish has also been depicted in a relief in the palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh.

Despite intensive preparations, Lachish and 45 other Judean strongholds perished. Finally, Sennacherib moved towards Judah's capital, Jerusalem, where he encircled the city according to Assyrian standard siege practice. Apparently it was just a matter of time until the Assyrian ruler would secure another victory. Sennacherib's annals

claim "I locked him [Hezekiah] up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage."

Then suddenly the Assyrians left. Hezekiah even stayed on his throne. According to the Bible, God sent an angel into the camp of the Assyrians, which killed most of their army in one night – an indication of a deadly plague in the camp. Assyrian sources tell a different story: Hezekiah paid a high tribute in order to save his city. Besides gold, silver, and Judah's elite fighting troops, Sennacherib claimed he "took out 200,100 people, (...) horses, mules, donkeys, and camels, cattle and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil."

Another theory suggests that Sennacherib had to leave immediately because a rebellion had broken out in Babylonia. His withdrawal saved Jerusalem – at least for the time being. Judah, however, had suffered dearly from the political blunder of Hezekiah: the deportation of a considerable part of its population devastated the economy.

The Assyrian Empire reached its peak in the following decades with the conquest of Thebes, the capital of Egypt. However, internal power struggles led to its demise. At the end of the 7th century, Assyria fell to the rising power of Babylonia. Desperate, it formed an alliance with Egypt.

During the Battle of Carchemish (in modern-day Syria) in 605 BCE, the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar dealt the Assyrian Empire its final blow. In the following years, the Babylonian ruler conquered the entire Levant and established Babylon as the new superpower in the Middle East.

## THE ASSYRIAN WAR MACHINE

### WARRIORS

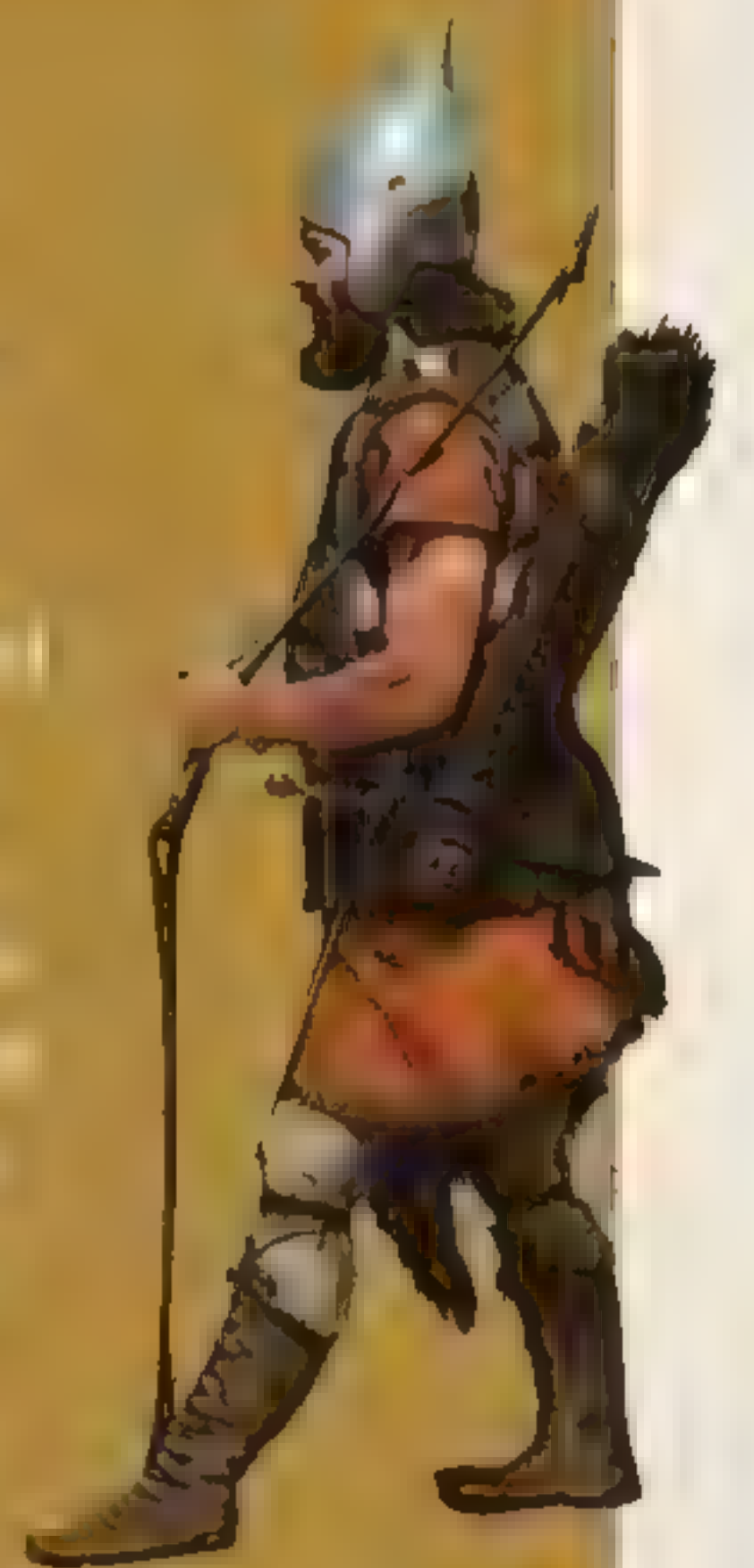


#### INFANTRYMEN

Assyrian infantrymen were the backbone of the army. They were equipped with a long spear, a short sword, and a shield. They fought in a phalanx formation, with the spearman in front and the swordman behind. They were also trained in the use of the bow and arrow.

#### ARCHERS

Assyrian archers were a vital part of the army. They were equipped with a bow and arrow, and a quiver. They fought from a distance, using their superior archery skills to weaken the enemy's ranks. They were also trained in the use of the spear and sword.



#### AUXILIARIES

Assyrian auxiliaries were a diverse group of soldiers. They included men from other parts of the empire, as well as men from foreign lands. They were trained in a variety of weapons and tactics, and they fought alongside the main body of the army.



#### SLINGERS

Assyrian slingers were a specialized unit of the army. They were trained in the use of the sling, a weapon that could throw stones or lead balls at a distance. They were also trained in the use of the spear and sword.







# BATTLE OF ACTIUM

ON 2 SEPTEMBER 31 BCE, OCTAVIAN AND AGRIPPA CLASHED WITH ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA IN THE ULTIMATE FIGHT FOR POWER



## 1 ANTONY PREPARES AT ACTIUM

Antony's warships wait at the harbour. He has ordered full sail on his ships, which is strange, as sails are for cruising, not fighting, where rowers are used. His 250-ton quinqueremes are weighted with iron plating and bronze spikes for ramming, with eight and ten banks of oars.

## 2 OCTAVIAN AND AGRIPPA'S FLEET

Octavian's 250 ships are small, but he has the advantage of speed and manoeuvrability with his well-trained and disciplined crews, especially in stronger tides nearer the harbour. Antony's superior ships are under-manned by inexperienced "mule-drivers, farmers, and boys".

## 3 BATTLE LINES ARE SET

Octavian's line of ships faces his enemy's, with the left wing led by Agrippa and the right by Octavian himself. He plans to surround Antony's ships and fight at close quarters with swords and shields, as if on land besieging a town. Antony draws his ships tightly together, hoping to lure Octavian closer and drive his ships against the shore.

## 4 ANTONY BOOSTS MORALE

Antony rallies his troops as his 500 ships face the Roman fleet: they can rely on their weight even if they lack the manpower to reach ramming speed. Octavian fears direct engagement with these juggernauts, as clashes would easily shear off the prows of the lighter-weight Roman ships. Cleopatra's navy supports Antony's to the rear.

## 5 MORNING: HOURS OF WAITING

The fleets sit idle until midday, when the tides make the wings on the lines slowly drift, creating gaps in each line. Thanks to a defector, Octavian knows Antony's strategy. His ships stay out of range while he orders his right wing to row backwards to lure Antony into deeper water.



**F**ollowing a struggle for power over Rome, former triumvirs Octavian and Mark Antony (the latter based in client-kingdom Egypt) faced each other in battle at sea near the city of Actium, off the coast of Epirus. Antony had the advantage of experience, bigger and heavier ships, and greater manpower, but Agrippa, Octavian's general, held the fierce loyalty of the Roman soldiers at his command. Deciding to fight at sea, Antony enjoyed a huge advantage over Agrippa's fleet, as his quinqueremes were far heavier than their Roman equivalents.

## 10 THE LEADERLESS SURRENDER

For several hours Antony's fleet fights valiantly against Octavian. Eventually they surrender after a sudden gale batters the ships. Three hundred ships are captured or sunk and 5,000 men lost. The remaining generals surrender that evening when they realise Antony really has abandoned them.

## THE AFTERMATH OF ACTIUM

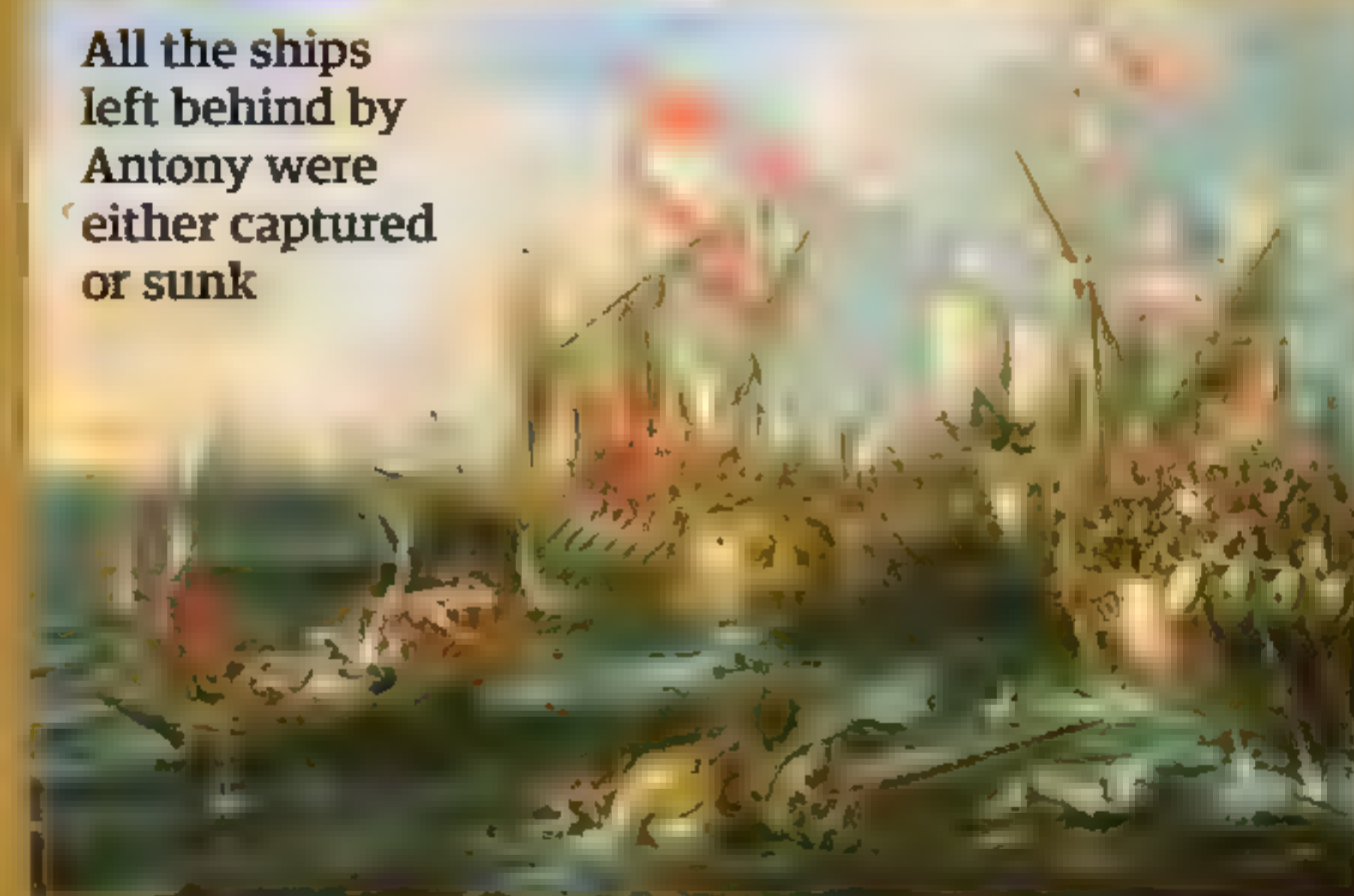
While his men loyally fought to the end, Antony abandoned his fleet at Actium and with it his reputation and chance to rule Rome from the East.



As a battle, Actium wasn't actually that spectacular, a clash full of idling, false starts, and delays. Had Antony seized his chance months earlier and taken Octavian and Agrippa's troops in a land battle, he'd have been victorious. Historian Plutarch, who was more interested in Octavian's moral superiority than tactics, weapons, and battle plans, assures us that Antony was too besotted with Cleopatra to succeed and that he arrogantly desired to meet Octavian at sea.

The consequences of Antony's decision were literally the stuff of Hollywood, as Cleopatra's dramatic escape in a small boat with Octavian's troops and her own army and household fled the battle, leaving Antony's fleet to the victors.

All the ships left behind by Antony were either captured or sunk.



cheated Octavian of his triumphal prize of a defeated queen to display in Rome with her own dramatic suicide.

With Antony defeated and Egypt annexed (after the Battle of Alexandria in 30 BCE, where the ships of Antony's supporters sailed out to meet Octavian's and simply joined his side), Actium became a pivotal landmark in Roman history, signifying Octavian's victory over the last of his great rivals. It enabled Octavian to become the first emperor in civil war and enabled him to take control of the Republic, which he ruled as the first emperor, Augustus, until his death in 14 BCE.

## 9 ANTONY'S NAVY FIERCELY BATTLES ON

Unaware that their general has left, Antony's forces bravely continue the battle, firing missiles and clashing with swords as the enemy boards their ships. Some boats are set on fire, while the soldiers on other vessels concede and throw their weapons overboard as they try to escape.

## 8 THE PLAN CHANGES

In the heat of battle, Cleopatra's ships suddenly cruise forward, heading towards the Roman lines. She soon gives the signal to retreat, which Antony doesn't see. In the confusion, Antony thinks the Egyptians are panicking due to impending defeat. He abandons his fleet to join Cleopatra.

## 7 MISSILE FIRE

Wicker shields protect Antony's men from the blows of spears and poles as the Romans fire flaming missiles into his ships. He retaliates by ordering his catapults to fire on the Romans from high up in wooden towers on the ships.

## 6 THE SHIPS ENGAGE

As the fleets come within range of each other, Octavian's ships sail in quickly to fire volleys of arrows at the enemy then row away quickly. Antony's ships have iron grappling hooks that can be launched and used to pull the boats together.

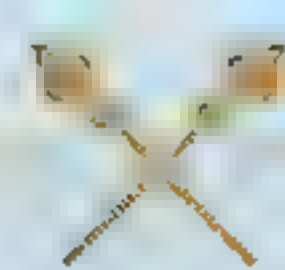




ANCIENT BATTLES

# BATTLE OF PLATAEA

**2,500 YEARS AGO, AN ALLIANCE OF A FEW GREEK CITY-STATES DEFEATED THE INVADING ARMY OF THE MIGHTY PERSIAN EMPIRE, SAVING GREECE AND SECURING THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN CIVILISATION**



Written by William Brundage





On the final day of the battle the Persians, led by Mardonius on his charger, held their own against the more heavily armed Spartans. But after their leader had fallen, the entire Persian army was routed.

OPPOSING FORCES	
<b>GREEK ALLIES</b>	<b>PERSIAN ARMY</b>
COMMANDER Pausanias	COMMANDER Mardonius
HOPLITES 40,000	ARCHER-SPEARMEN 80,000
LIGHT INFANTRY 50,000	CAVALRY 5,000
ARCHERS 800	GREEK HOPLITES 10,000
	GREEK LIGHT INFANTRY 10,000

In the summer of 480 BCE, the Great King of Persia, Xerxes, led an immense army and fleet into Europe with the goal of conquering Greece. Fifteen years earlier the Athenians had played a minor part in the five-year revolt of his Greek subjects spread across the western fringe of his empire, and in 490 BCE they had added injury to insult at Marathon by comprehensively defeating a punitive expedition launched by Darius, Xerxes' father. Darius had planned a second expedition in overwhelming force, but this was delayed by insurrection in Egypt and his death in 485 BCE. It was Xerxes' duty as Darius' successor to execute the plan.

In strategic terms, the conquest of mainland Greece and the islands and northern seaboard of the Aegean would stabilise the empire's western frontier. Then, as 'Great King, King of Kings, Ruler of the Lands', Xerxes or his successors might have turned their thoughts beyond Greece to Sicily and Italy. More would then be at stake even than Greece's immediate future and the golden age of classical civilisation.

Herodotus, our foremost source for these critical years, puts these words into Xerxes' mouth in a speech to his council of leading Persians: "If we conquer the Athenians and their neighbours, we shall extend the territory of Persia to the very edge of the earth, even where it joins with God's heaven. When I have passed through Europe, there will be no lands under the sun that lie outside our borders, because I will make all lands one land." The speech is invented, but it plausibly represents Xerxes' vision and sense of destiny.

Just over 30 of the hundreds of Greek city-states resisted the Persian invasion - fortunately this included four of the most powerful: Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Aegina. These cities were appalled at the prospect of falling under tyrannical rule sustained by external power, especially if that power flowed from a towering throne hundreds of kilometres away. This would be a contradiction of their developing concepts of freedom (*eleutheria*), self-rule with no external constraints, and autonomy (*autonomia*), a state's exclusive right to make and implement its own laws, determine how to manage its wealth, and decide when to go to war. Under Persian rule, any form of government might have been allowed, even emerging democratic systems as at Athens, but tribute would have to be paid and military service could be required at any time. At the level of the state and by individual (male) citizens, this was seen as slavery.

THE COST OF VICTORY

In the several decades up to 480 BCE the Persians had very rarely experienced defeat in battle. Having advanced unopposed into central Greece, they quickly brushed aside the first line of defence on land at Thermopylae. However, the Greek fleet had so far held its own against greatly superior numbers in the Straits of Artemisium. The relatively modest casualties at Thermopylae







# ANCIENT BATTLES

were sustainable, but the opening of the land route to Attica made their position untenable. The Persians could now move quickly to cross over to Euboea and attack the Greeks' naval encampment on the island's north shore and take control of the beaches and harbours that the Greeks would need to put into on their way south. Naval defeat would have ended the war, so the Greeks had no option but to withdraw immediately, sailing under cover of darkness.

As planned, Athens and Attica were evacuated. The entire allied fleet, which arrived a few days ahead of the Persians, was accommodated on the island of Salamis. The allied army, excluding the large Athenian contingent, was standing ready to block the land route into the Peloponnese. If the Persians won command of the sea, enabling them to land troops anywhere they pleased behind this defensive line, it would have been useless. This was the argument used by the Athenians, together with the bargaining power of their 200 ships – 60 per cent of the allied fleet – to hold the fractious alliance together and in agreement with their strategy. In 480 BCE, it was to bring the Persian fleet to battle in the confined waters of the Straits of Salamis where their numerical advantage could be neutralised. This strategy was famously executed in a brilliant victory, and Xerxes and his damaged and demoralised navy set sail for home.

Athens was left a smouldering ruin, with the Acropolis destroyed. Xerxes' nephew Mardonius stayed behind with a powerful force and the task, which he ambitiously embraced, of completing the conquest of Greece in the following year. The campaigning season was almost over, and Mardonius soon took his army north to winter quarters in Thessaly. The Greek allies dispersed to their cities. Having repaired what they could, the Athenians probably endured an uncomfortable winter, with many not bothering to return to their homes. The Persians would be back.

## THE SECOND CAMPAIGN

In early summer Mardonius led his troops south once more and reoccupied Athens and Attica, which had been evacuated a second time. For months he had been offering gold and privileges under imperial rule to Greek cities that would agree terms with the Great King. Athens was the most sought-after prize and Mardonius spared it any further destruction, still hoping the city could be detached from the alliance. Differences over strategy between Athens and Sparta were a fault line that again came close to rupture. But when Mardonius learned that the Spartans had finally agreed to march north with their Peloponnesian allies to join up with the Athenians and confront him, he left Athens in flames again and withdrew into Boeotia.

Mardonius could have offered battle on the plain to the west of Athens, which was good country for cavalry. However, the routes over the mountains out of Attica would be dangerous choke points if he had to retreat, and Boeotia gave him other

advantages. He would have friendly Thebes at his back, and his supply lines would be shortened and the Greeks' stretched. To save Greece, the Greeks now had to fight and win on a battlefield of Mardonius' choosing. There were to be naval operations, this time in the eastern Aegean, but the opposing fleets were considerably smaller than at Salamis, thereby freeing up manpower for the Greeks, especially the Athenians, to deploy forces on land.

Having marched his troops into Boeotia, Mardonius positioned them along the north side of the River Asopus on a six-kilometre (four-mile) front straddling the three roads that led to Thebes. The river's banks and muddy bed would make an opposed crossing difficult, and the Persians had built a large fortified camp a short distance back from the centre of their line. They had felled all the trees in the surrounding plain to supply the timber they needed for its palisade and gates and to clear the ground for the mobile tactics they favoured. Herodotus reports a vastly exaggerated figure of 350,000 for Mardonius' army. However, he may well have had more than 100,000, including a substantial cavalry division and several thousand Greek hoplites, and at its core 50-60,000 veteran Persian, Mede, and Scythian archer-spearmen.

A few days later the Greeks followed the Persians north and spread out east and west to form a defensive line along the foothills of Mount Cithaeron about four kilometres (2.5 miles) south of the enemy line. Rising ground gave some frontal protection, and the flanks rested on spurs or river gullies. The Spartans led the march through the pass and then east along the foothills to take their place of honour on the right of the line. The Greek left deployed to the west with the Athenians on that flank. It was as good a defensive position as the Greeks could hope for. The Spartan Pausanias, their commander-in-chief, was prepared to watch and wait. He was outnumbered, but his 40,000 hoplites were more heavily armed, if less agile, than Mardonius' Asian troops. In support there was at least the same number of light-armed troops. Overall these were less well-armed and less organised than Mardonius' Asians but included the unique Athenian regiment of several hundred archers.

## DAY 1: OPENING ACTION

After some days of inactivity, Mardonius launched a cavalry attack. He had several thousand horse,

while the Greeks had none apart from a few despatch riders. It was a standard Persian tactic to engage the enemy first with their mounted archers and javelin-throwers to soften up the opposition ranks and ideally disrupt their formation. Then the infantry would take over with a heavy archery barrage followed by close-quarters fighting with spear and sword.

The cavalry charged up to the Greek lines in waves, harassing them and shouting insults. The Megarian contingent, 3,000 hoplites strong, was more vulnerable than the rest on an area of flatter ground. The Persians concentrated their efforts, charging and wheeling and showering them with arrows and javelins as they passed across their front. The Megarians, unable to fight back and close to breaking and opening a lethal gap in the battle line, called for urgent assistance. The Athenians, who were positioned close by, sent across an elite detachment of 300 hoplites and their entire regiment of archers, the only archer unit in the Greek army. They ran out and immediately attacked the Persian flank.

The famous commander of the Persian cavalry at Plataea was called Masistius, who was conspicuously mounted on a beautiful charger with magnificent golden trappings. The horse was hit by an Athenian arrow, reared, and threw Masistius. The Athenians quickly swarmed around him, but he was not easy to kill. A huge man wearing golden scale-armour under his purple tunic, Masistius put up a fight, but he was



There was no cavalry in the Greek army, but the Thebans and other Greeks fighting for Persia contributed a few hundred. They did some damage to the disorganised Greek centre on the last day of the battle and provided some cover for the fleeing Persian infantry





The mixed company of Athenian hoplites and archers break up the Persian cavalry attack which threatened to break the Greek line in the first day of the battle. The archers, some Athenian and some mercenaries, traditionally wore Asian dress

finally speared through the eye slit of his helmet. The Persian cavalry at first did not know he had fallen, but then they regrouped and charged in a mass rather than in waves to try and recover their leader's body, calling up the infantry in support. The Athenians were now in danger of being overwhelmed, but support of their own arrived first, and the cavalry were finally beaten back. The Greeks were left with an impressive trophy, which they paraded along their line on a wagon.

### DAYS 2-8: STAND-OFF

The next morning, encouraged by their early success, the Greeks decided to advance to the area of low ridges to the south of the Asopus. Mardonius was content to allow them to move onto more open ground, which was where he wanted them, and to stretch and expose their supply line. In any case, he needed to rest his cavalry and give them time to mourn their dead leader.

Following normal practice before battles, each commander had seers carry out sacrifices and pronounce on the omens. The omens were the same for each side; victory in a defensive battle but defeat for either if they took the initiative and crossed the Asopus to attack. Both commanders were satisfied with this divine guidance, which most likely reinforced their own tactical assessments, and they settled down and waited, taking no further action for about a week. Each was positioned on ground where he believed he could fight most effectively.

The Greeks were well enough placed for static defence in their new position. They were protected on much of their front by rising ground and on the flanks by steeper inclines. But they could not prevent the enemy, especially their cavalry, getting round behind them, and it is surprising Mardonius did not exploit this weakness sooner than he did. However, a prolonged stand-off suited him. When and if the time came to fight again, he would have the Greeks in this more exposed position, weakened by days of uncertainty and dwindling supplies and possibly attacking out of desperation or retreating in disorder. And the

rewards for agreeing terms no doubt remained on offer. Overall, with Thebes and subdued central and northern Greece at his back, his logistics well organised, and his best troops veterans of long campaigns far from home, Mardonius was more comfortably placed than Pausanias.

The Spartan commander, on the other hand, was in country that had already been stripped bare by the Persians, and there was very little left in the way of resources to draw on in Attica. Greek armies normally carried only a small amount of food with them and otherwise expected to live off the land, so supplies had to be brought up from the Peloponnese. A further disadvantage was that the challenges of commanding the largest Greek army ever to take the field were completely outside the young Pausanias' or any of his fellow generals' experience.

### DAYS 9-12: THE RAZOR'S EDGE

A week passed, then Mardonius sent cavalry behind the Greek lines to cut them off from their supplies. They intercepted a large supply column emerging from the pass and captured many of the beasts and wagons. Mardonius let two more





## ANCIENT BATTLES

days pass then made his next move. The Persian cavalry crossed the river on both flanks and attacked in full force. They galloped the length of the line, front and rear, and mauled the Greeks with their javelins and arrows. It was impossible for the Greeks to engage with them; all they could do was shelter behind their shields. Inevitably arrows found their mark, and the light-armed troops huddled inside the hoplite perimeter were particularly vulnerable.

In the course of this attack the Persians found the spring to the Greeks' rear that was their main source of water. They fouled it and blocked it up, meaning the Greeks were now cut off from both food and water and being continuously and severely harassed. To compound their dire situation, several days' dense occupation of the same area of land by tens of thousands of men within a tight perimeter would have made the conditions increasingly foul.

The Greek commanders gathered to address these problems. A decision was taken to fall back that night into the foothills of Cithaeron. The new line was to be the same distance from the Asopus as the first day's position but to run from the exit to the main pass, where the supplies were now stranded, to the rising ground in front of the city of Plataea, which the Persians had burned earlier. This was to be a stronger defensive position with access to food and drinking water.

At the agreed time, the Greek centre set off. They had two to three kilometres (one to two miles) to cover heading for the base of Cithaeron but, losing their way in the dark or misunderstanding their orders, they marched a greater distance in the direction of Plataea to the west of their objective and took up position in front of the city. The Greek right and left divisions remained in position on the ridges overlooking the Asopus, about two kilometres (a mile) apart and out of sight of each other, even in daylight. There is a wonderful story told against the Spartans of one of their regimental commanders, Amompharetus, holding up the planned manoeuvre by doggedly refusing to retreat because it would bring shame on Sparta. Suspecting Spartan duplicity, the story goes on, the Athenians also stayed put, sending a horseman over to see what they were doing. Pausanias replied by requesting the Athenians to link up with his division and do whatever he did in the withdrawal.

### THE SPARTANS STAND ALONE

However this situation came about, Pausanias finally gave the order to move at dawn, and his entire division, apart from Amompharetus' unit, headed north. Amompharetus waited until the rest of the division was well on its way then led his men off in formation at a slow pace to rejoin the rest, who had gone about a mile. They had

#### 1 OVERNIGHT

The Greek centre falls back towards Plataea. The plan is for the whole army to reform on a shorter front, overlapping with their first-day position but running west from the exit to the pass to the eastern side of the ruins of Plataea. The right is (allegedly) held up by Amompharetus' refusal to retreat, and the left stays put as requested by Pausanias.

#### 2 DAWN

The Greek right finally moves, leaving Amompharetus and his unit behind, but it pauses some way short of its intended position. Pausanias requests the Greek left link up with his left.

Single combat between a Greek hoplite and an unusually well-armed Persian; his shield, though smaller than the hoplite's, looks equally solid, and his scale armour is a match for that worn by Masistius. The soft headgear is typical, however





**7 GREEKS PURSUE**

The Greek centre breaks ranks to join in the rout but is intercepted by the Persians' Greek cavalry and sustains casualties.

**6 PAUSANIAS COUNTERS**

Pausanias finally attacks, but by now the Persian centre divisions have crowded in behind Mardonius' left, boxing it in. After fierce hand-to-hand fighting Mardonius falls and the Spartans break the Persian infantry, starting a general rout back across the river to the fort. The Persian cavalry provides the retreat with some cover before heading north to escape to Asia with a few thousand of the best infantry. The Athenians on the Greek left are also victorious, and the Thebans fall back behind their city walls.

**3 PERSIAN CAVALRY ADVANCES**

The Persian cavalry (coming from the left and right of the fort), observing the Greek right has abandoned its position, probes forward and attacks it from all sides just as Amompharetus' unit rejoins it.

**4 GREEK VERSUS GREEK**

The Greek troops on the Persian right track the Greek left, cross the river and attack over the flatter ground, Theban and Athenian hoplites colliding.

**5 SPARTANS ARE HARD-PRESSED**

The massed archer-spearmen on the Persian left cross the river and advance to form up opposite the Greek right and take over the archery bombardment from the cavalry. The cavalry withdraws. Pausanias waits.





## ANCIENT BATTLES

halted there to wait for Amompharetus' unit, but just as it reached them the Persian cavalry attacked.

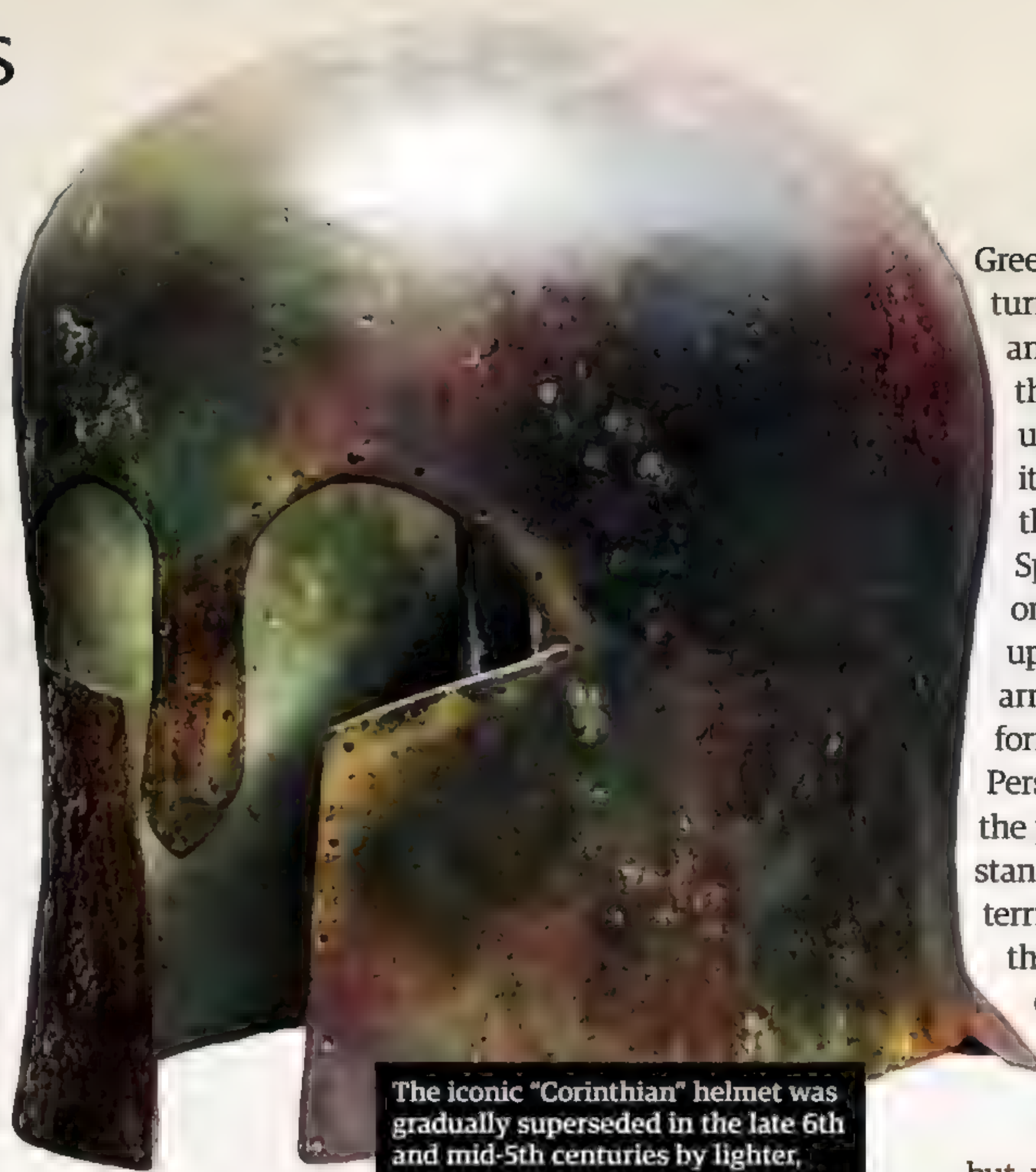
The cavalry had pushed forward, seeing empty ground where the Greeks had been drawn up previously. It may have been a coincidence that Amompharetus rejoined the main force at exactly the moment when the cavalry caught up with it, but this would also be consistent with a measured rearguard action to buy time for Pausanias to fall back with the rest of his 11,500 hoplites and form them up into battle order. If his unit comprised approximately 1,000 hoplites, with a larger number of light-armed Helots, he could cover quite a broad front in a tight formation and keep the Persians occupied. According to some sources, Amompharetus, who died in the ensuing fighting, was identified as one of the heroes of the battle, which his alleged act of insubordination would not have merited.

Drawn up in close order and, for the sake of argument, eight ranks deep, Pausanias' hoplites, with substantial light-armed support, would have formed an extremely solid front 2,000–3,000 metres (6,560–9,840 feet) in width. The gully formed by a tributary of the Asopus, which cannot now be located, would have covered one of his flanks, and similar terrain may have protected the other, but it is likely the cavalry could get around his flanks and behind him. The Athenians had not arrived and Pausanias was for now isolated. However, he was closer to the main pass, an escape route if needed, and to the supplies that were held up there, and his men had fallen back without disruption.

Mardonius led his Persian infantry at the double across the Asopus (again ignoring his seers' warnings that this would bring defeat). If his cavalry and the Greek right were out of sight, he would have known where they were from messages sent back and probably from the dust raised. He may have thought he was pursuing the whole of the Greek army, but it is more likely that he was seizing the opportunity to overwhelm the most significant part of it by concentrating his cavalry and best Asian infantry. He probably knew that the Greek centre had fallen further back and that the left had abandoned their position, though he may not have known exactly where the latter were going. When they saw the Persians charging off in pursuit of the Greeks, the rest of the Barbarian contingents raised their standards and set off after them.

### PERSIANS ATTACK THE GREEK RIGHT FLANK

When the cavalry caught up with him, Pausanias sent an urgent request to the Athenians to come to his aid immediately, or at least to send their archers. The Athenians were already on the way



The iconic "Corinthian" helmet was gradually superseded in the late 6th and mid-5th centuries by lighter, more open-faced types

and making every effort to get over to support him, but the Greeks on the Persian right had tracked their move to the east, crossed the river, and attacked them. With over 11,000 hoplites on the Greek side and at least that number from Thebes and other cities opposing them, this was a massive confrontation in its own right. However, almost nothing is known about it beyond that it was an Athenian victory, unfortunately eclipsed in history by the larger event playing out a short distance away.

The Persian cavalry harassed Pausanias' formation for an hour or more while Mardonius' infantry covered the three to four kilometres (two to 2.5 miles) from their position on the north side of the river. When the infantry arrived, the cavalry withdrew to rest their horses and replenish javelins and arrows, waiting for the moment to attack again when the Greek line broke. The massed Persian infantry now increased the pressure with a continuous and heavier barrage of arrows from behind their palisade of wicker shields. The Greeks endured the bombardment, crouching, kneeling, or sitting behind and under their shields, all the while taking casualties. Their body armour, helmets, and shields were generally hardened against the light Asian missiles, but they could still find exposed faces, necks, arms, or legs. The light-armed troops huddled inside the formation were more vulnerable.

The seers performed their sacrifices, but the omens still would not come out right and the

Greeks were struggling. Then Pausanias turned towards the nearby temple of Hera and prayed to the goddess. As he prayed, the 1,500 Tegean allies to his left stood up and went forward. As tradition has it, Pausanias' prayer was answered, the omens became favourable, and the Spartans got to their feet and in close order, with measured tread, bore down upon the Persians. The rest of Mardonius' army crowding in behind his Persians formed an anvil for the Spartan hammer. Persians, standing against hoplites without the protection of a bronze helmet or the standard heavy shield, would have sustained terrible wounds from Greek spear thrusts, but they fought hard. Herodotus describes the climax of the battle:

"The Persians set aside their bows and faced up to the Greeks and at first the fighting was along the shield wall but, when this had been pushed down, there was a bitter hand-to-hand struggle because the Barbarians kept grabbing the Greeks' spears and breaking them. The Persians were not inferior in courage or strength, but they were not armed like hoplites or trained in their way of fighting, and they did not have the tactical skill of their opponents. They were darting forward in ones and tens, gathering together in larger or smaller groups and hurling themselves at the Spartans, and getting cut down. But wherever Mardonius was fighting, mounted on his white charger with his picked band of a thousand, the flower of the Persians, there they pressed the enemy hardest. And while Mardonius lived, the Persians held their own and, fighting back, struck down many Spartans. But Mardonius fell and when the men around him, the best in his army, had been slain, then the rest were put to flight. And on that day the most glorious victory we have ever known was won by Pausanias, son of Cleombrotus son of Anaxandrides." (9.62–64)

The Persian fort was stormed later in the day, with many killed or taken prisoner, and Thebes was taken after a three-week siege. A few thousand of Mardonius' original force escaped home to Asia.

The tiny minority of Greek city-states that took up arms against the mightiest empire yet seen in the ancient world had halted its western expansion and driven it back. If they had failed, there would have been no golden flowering of Athenian culture and institutions in the decades that followed. If Greece had become part of a Persian Empire, with Italy now on its frontier, Rome may never have flourished into the formidable western world power that it did. Without the bloodstream of the Roman Empire's communications network to sustain it, Christianity might never have grown to become a world religion. A Persian victory could have profoundly redirected the evolution of the cultural, intellectual, political, and religious landscapes of Europe and the Middle East.

**"ON THAT DAY THE MOST GLORIOUS VICTORY WE HAVE EVER KNOWN WAS WON BY PAUSANIAS"**





The frieze of the archers (detail),  
from the palace of Darius I, king of  
Persia, in Susa (6th century BCE)





ANCIENT BATTLES

# BATTLE OF LAKE TRASIMENE

ON A FOGGY JUNE DAY IN 217 BCE, THE ROMAN ARMY WAS ROUTED IN ONE OF THE MOST AUDACIOUS AMBUSHES IN MILITARY HISTORY

Written by *James M. McManus*





**R**ome indeed was not built in day. It was built over many years and by defeating many enemies, but few of the empire's adversaries were more feared than Hannibal Barca.

Hannibal was an unconventional Carthaginian general: innovative, daring, and ruthless. These characteristics coalesced in 217 BCE when he achieved one of his greatest victories against Rome at the Battle of Lake Trasimene in central Italy during the Second Punic War. It was a victory that shook the complacent Roman Senate and forced them into a major shift in strategy.

When Hannibal was born in 247 BCE, the war between the Carthage and Rome had been raging for 17 years. In fact, the war between these two Mediterranean powers would last, on and off, from 264 BCE to 164 BCE in what became known as the Punic Wars (*Punic* derives from *Punicus*, the Latin

word for the Carthaginians, which attested to their Phoenician lineage).

The first war began in 264 BCE as a power struggle over Sicily, an island of strategic importance for both Rome and Carthage, the latter a city in modern-day Tunisia, North Africa. Rome triumphed after more than 20 years of fighting - its navy a decisive factor - and took possession of Sicily. The defeated Carthaginians were forced to pay substantial reparations.

Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, was a general in the Carthaginian army during the First Punic War and, according to the Roman historian Livy in his work *History of Rome*, he instilled in his son a strong hatred of Rome. "So soon as age will permit," vowed a young Hannibal, "I will use fire and steel to arrest the destiny of Rome."

Far from demoralising Carthage, their defeat and the subsequent reparations caused a deep

resentment and a thirst for revenge. Not only had Carthage lost Sicily, but their status as a major power had suffered across the Mediterranean. As Rome extended its influence in what is now Spain, Carthage began to discreetly rebuild its army under Hannibal. It was helped by the arrogance of the Roman Senate, which believed the Carthaginian question had been incontestably resolved.

Hannibal set out to prove Rome wrong. Drawing on the lessons of the First Punic War, in which Rome's navy had been key to their victory, Hannibal knew the second war must be a land campaign. His plan was an audacious one: to lead his army through Spain, into France, and then into northern Italy.

From the outset, Hannibal proved an innovative, adaptable, and astute military commander. A reconnaissance force was dispatched ahead



The Carthaginian general and statesman Hannibal fighting in the Iberian Peninsula during the Second Punic War





of the main army to establish their route and also to make contact with the native tribes that they would encounter in what is today Spain and France.

The Greek historian Polybius (200-c.118 BCE) wrote that Hannibal's main army comprised of 82,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry, and 37 war elephants, figures that are impossible to corroborate. Little is known of Hannibal's famous elephants and how they came into his possession, although some historians suggest they may have been a species of North African elephant that is now extinct.

On its march through Spain, Hannibal's army fought several skirmishes with local tribes, and they, plus sickness and exhaustion, depleted his forces. He crossed the Pyrenees with around 50,000 infantry and 9,000 cavalry.

In 2024, an archaeological dig in the Pyrenees 112 kilometres (70 miles) north of Barcelona discovered the remains of a two-storey house that was razed around the time Hannibal's forces passed through. An iron pick and a gold earring were found in a small pot, suggesting that the owners hid the items in anticipation of an attack.

Once in France, Hannibal recruited many Gauls to his army, and in October 218 BCE, they crossed the Rhone River in rafts and then traversed the Alps into Italy. His army now comprised about 38,000 infantry and 8,000 cavalry, and they

## “HE THEREFORE EMBARKED ON A SCORCHED EARTH POLICY, PILLAGING VILLAGES AND TOWNS”

met their first Roman opponents near the Po River, defeating a force under Consul Tiberius Sempronius Longus in the Battle of Trebia. The Second Punic War had begun.

Hannibal's army lacked two essentials, which influenced his strategy in 217 BCE. He had no siege weapons with which to force Rome into submission, and nor did he have sustenance for his men and animals. He therefore embarked on a scorched earth policy, pillaging villages and towns and burning them to the ground as his force moved slowly down Italy. Livy wrote of Hannibal: “His temperament, prone as it was to rapacity and cruelty, led him to plunder the places which he was unable to defend, in order that they might be left to the enemy waste and barren.”

In response to Hannibal's invasion of Italy, the Senate in Rome raised four new legions and nominated Gaius Flaminius Nepos to lead the army against the intruder. One might, in modern parlance, describe Flaminius as a populist, a man who Livy described as possessing “bold words and little talent who based a career on pandering to the desires of the poorest citizens”.

As Hannibal pushed south, he approached the Apennine Mountains that run down Italy, and the Romans saw this as the moment to strike. Flaminius, and other forces commanded by Servilius, were despatched to block the eastern and western flanks of the Apennines. But Hannibal had anticipated such a move and easily outmanoeuvred his enemy. Moving at pace, his army crossed the mountains into Etruria, north of Rome, after which they faced a four-day march through treacherous marshes.

When Hannibal and his men staggered out of the marshes they were behind Flaminius' army, and the hunter now became the hunted. Hannibal provoked Flaminius into rash action by plundering the countryside. “He felt it to be a personal disgrace that an enemy should be roaming at will through Italy and advancing to attack Rome with none to hinder him,” wrote Livy of the Roman general. While Flaminius' council of war urged caution, advising him to wait for the arrival of Servilius, the general reacted angrily, saying he would not let Hannibal “ravage Italy, destroy and burn everything in his way till he reaches Rome”.



# LAKE TRASIMENE

His army marched to confront Hannibal, but the initiative was with the invader, who selected Lake Trasimene as the site for his ambush. He pitched his tented camp to the east but concealed his foot soldiers in the hills and woods overlooking the lake and positioned his cavalry in a defile at the northern shore.

On the morning of 21 June, Flaminius' army of 40,000 soldiers approached the lake from the north along a narrow road, unaware of the ambush that awaited. They could see six kilometres (four miles) in the distance the fires of Hannibal's camp. Livy described how Hannibal sprung his trap:

"He gave the signal for all to make a simultaneous attack, and they charged straight down upon the point nearest to them. The affair was all the more sudden and unexpected to the Romans because a fog which had risen from the lake was denser on the plain than on the heights... Fighting began in front and flank before they could form a line or get their weapons ready or draw their swords."

Caught by surprise, hemmed in by the terrain, and with fog reducing visibility to a few yards, the Romans were cut to pieces. "In such a thick fog ears were of more use than eyes," wrote Livy. "The men turned their gaze in every direction as they heard the groans of the wounded and the blows on shield or breastplate, and the mingled shouts of triumph and cries of panic."

Most of the Romans stood their ground and fought bravely, but they were unable to form up into their disciplined ranks and were reduced to battling the enemy in small pockets.

Accounts vary of how Flaminius met his end; Polybius says he died a coward's death but Livy writes that he went down fighting, killed by the spear of a charging cavalryman. Whatever the truth, word of his death demoralised the Romans according to Livy: "They rushed like blind men over cliff and defile, men and arms tumbled pell-mell on one another. A large number, finding no avenue of escape, went into the water up to their shoulders; some in their wild terror even attempted to escape by swimming, an endless and hopeless task in that lake."

After four hours of brutal fighting, an estimated 17,000 corpses littered the battlefield, around 15,000 of whom were Romans. In

A 19th-century depiction of Hannibal's troops routing the Romans in Lake Trasimene



Hannibal was the son of a Carthaginian general who instilled in him from a young age a hatred for Rome

addition to this, 15,000 more had been captured, and the survivors fled south to warn Rome of the humiliation. The panic on the battlefield was mirrored in Rome itself, and for the first time in 30 years, a military

dictator was appointed. Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus proved an inspired choice, acquiring the nickname "the delayer".

A veteran campaigner, Fabius recognised that the most effective strategy against Hannibal was to make it hard for his army to keep living off the land by cutting off his food source. Fabius also refused to be drawn into any more pitched battles, preferring hit-and-run raids.

Fabius' dictatorship lasted a year, and then the people went to the polls to elect their new consuls. Lucius Aemilius Paullus and Gaius Terentius Varro triumphed and immediately dispensed with Fabius' defensive strategy, choosing to go on the offensive instead. Their hubris proved to be fatal. In 216 BCE, Hannibal once again destroyed a Roman army, this time at the Battle of Cannae. Roman morale would have to be rebuilt once more.



Fabius Maximus, shown here in a 1912 painting, prevented Hannibal capitalising on his victory at Trasimene





# BATTLE OF GAIXIA

**IN 202 BCE, A DECISIVE CLASH OF ARMS ENDED YEARS OF FRACTIOUS RULE AND ESTABLISHED THE HAN DYNASTY IN CHINA**



Written by Greg King

**I**n 203 BCE, the China was in a state of turmoil. The death of Emperor Qin Shi Huang in 210 BCE had marked the beginning of a fractious time of warring kingdoms jostling for power and influence. Two opposing forces emerged in this struggle: Liu Bang, king of Han, and Xiang Yu, king of Western Chu. Bang, born a peasant, had risen to power as a Qin bureaucrat despite his reputation as being something of a scoundrel, while Xiang Yu, who was of noble birth, was known for his brutality. Both joined forces to rebel against the dynasty's remnants, forcibly ousting Ziyang - who had succeeded Qin Er Shi, son of Emperor Huang - in 206 BCE.

Xiang Yu emerged as the recognised leader and divided the former empire into 18 kingdoms, giving Liu Bang the poorest province and title king of Han. But Liu Bang was not content to serve as the token ruler of an impoverished backwater, and in 206 BCE he launched an uprising against the Chu Kingdom in what became known as the four-year Chu-Han Contention.

The Han armies, led by General Han Xin, proved superior, and Xiang Yu, facing defeat, proposed a truce, with China divided between Liu Bang, Han Xin, and himself. General Han Xin, though, refused, paving the way for a battle that changed Chinese history.

Throughout 204 and into 203, Liu Bang and Xiang Yu led their respective armies into the hills of Guangwu outside of the city of Xingyan. Xiang Yu threatened Liu Bang and even ordered his archers to fire on him, but his enemy survived the assassination attempt. This only strengthened Liu Bang's resolve; with a superior army of 560,000 men, he forced Xiang Yu to enter into negotiations. The terms specified that the two would divide China into separate kingdoms split along the ancient Hongguo Canal. Faced with imminent defeat, Xiang Yu agreed, but the offer was a ruse as Liu Bang reinforced his troops and prepared for a final confrontation.

Liu Bang ordered General Han Xin to launch a successful attack on Western Chu. Although military victory seemed within reach, Han Xin



Liu Bang, later Emperor Gaozu

opted for a dramatic strategy. Xiang Yu was deeply enamoured of his favourite concubine, Lady Yuji, and took her on his campaigns. Knowing that she was behind the lines of fighting, General Han Xin raided her camp and kidnapped her, taking her into the narrow Gaixia Canyon on the plains of Central China, aware that Xiang Yu would follow to rescue her. He did so, leading his 100,000 troops into a trap.

As soon as Xiang Yu's forces had entered the canyon at Gaixia, General Han Xin deployed his superior force of 300,000 troops from all sides. Xiang Yu managed to rescue Lady Yuji, but his

forces were badly mauled. Taking advantage of this, Liu Bang and General Han Xin had their men force the captured enemy soldiers to sing folk songs of their native Chu, adding lyrics that falsely claimed the kingdom had fallen to the Hans. This demoralised Xiang Yu's remaining troops. They began deserting throughout the night; when Xiang Yu tried to stop them, Lady Yuji intervened, warning that all was over. With Xiang Yu and Lady Yuji alone, she performed a ceremonial sword dance for him and then, seizing one of the weapons, she killed herself, feeling responsible for the defeat.

A despondent Xiang Yu buried his beloved and, with his 800 remaining men, managed to escape the canyon, but he was surrounded at the Wu River. Seeing most of his troops fall in the onslaught, Xiang Yu took his sword and slit his own throat rather than be taken prisoner.

The victorious Liu Bang proclaimed himself Emperor Gaozu, founding China's Han dynasty, which ruled for the next 200 years. He quickly consolidated power, executing his former ally General Han Xin before demonstrating a previously unsuspected aptitude for rule. During his tenure the Han dynasty laid the foundations for the thousand-year Chinese Empire. Gaozu cultivated the noble class and oversaw a period of significant economic prosperity and innovation, which included the production of paper, advances in cartography and mathematics, and the study of astronomy. His soldiers helped establish the famed Silk Road, and Gaozu embraced Confucianism.

The former Liu Bang succeeded against all odds. His reign as Emperor Gaozu is now regarded as one of the most significant in Chinese history, and he is widely esteemed for uniting the formerly divided realm and solidifying imperial rule.

**“THE VICTORIOUS LIU BANG PROCLAIMED HIMSELF EMPEROR GAOZU, FOUNDING CHINA’S HAN DYNASTY, WHICH RULED FOR THE NEXT 200 YEARS”**





An engraving of Xiang Yu at the time of the Battle of Gaixia

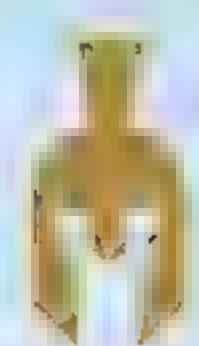


A statue of Liu Bang, Emperor Gaozu, in Guazhou, Gansu province, China





# BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE



## PROPHECIES AND PLANNING

Before leaving Sparta, King Leonidas consulted an oracle, who foresaw his death at Thermopylae. Resigned to his fate but refusing to cower in the face of such destiny, the king chose 300 men from the royal bodyguard who had sons to carry on their bloodlines in their stead.

## DRESSED FOR WAR

In reality, the Spartans that met the Persian armies at Thermopylae weren't bare-chested or wearing capes – they would have been clad in traditional armour plating and plumed helmets. In fact, up close, Spartan armour was almost indistinguishable from other Greek battle plate.

## BOUND BY TRADITION

So why did only 300 Spartans march to meet the Persians? Why didn't Sparta react with a full-strength army? The answer lies in the festival of Carneia, a religious and cultural annual Spartan celebration that forbade fielding an army against an enemy until the festivities were over.



**I**mmortalised on stage, screen, and the pages of literature and sequential art, the battle between 300 war-hardened Spartans and the armies of the entire Persian Empire has rightfully become the stuff of legend. The fact that such a confrontation can be called a 'battle' considering the sheer one-sided nature of it gives you some idea just how brutally efficient the warriors of Greece were. The Battle of Thermopylae was one of many skirmishes of the Greco-Persian Wars, a series of conflicts that raged between the Achaemenid Empire of Persia and the free city-states of Greece between 499 BCE and 449 BCE.

The Persian Empire had risen around the mid-6th century BCE and expanded exponentially across Asia, Europe, and the Mediterranean; eventually its eyes fell on the fragmented states of Greece. Established by Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE, the Achaemenid Empire (also known as the First Persian Empire) became the largest imperial domain of the ancient world thanks to its impressive armies, which swelled with every new territory conquered.

For the Persians, Greece remained a distant principality of little consideration, but a political misunderstanding between the two would set the stage for war and invasion. The Persian monarch, King Darius, demanded gifts of water and earth from every known land as symbols of their obedience and would send emissaries across the Persian Empire and beyond to collect them. One such emissary was met by the Greeks, and believing the man had come to organise an alliance with Persia, he was duly sent back to his masters with a suitable offering.

When news of the Greek pledge reached the Athenian Assembly – the governmental construct that oversaw the running of Athenian society – it immediately distanced itself from the offering, keen to preserve its status of independence. Upon hearing of the foreign principality's refusal to recognise his sovereignty, the Persian monarch – who was also out to avenge an earlier rebellion by Greek city-states in Ionia – dispatched a fleet to bring the rebels to heel.

The campaign proved a disaster for Darius. His armies were stunningly defeated by the Greeks at

the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, and when the king died four years later it fell to his son Xerxes to continue the campaign. Xerxes I spent four years amassing a grand army powerful enough to subdue all Greece and the defiant Athenians.

The Athenians knew the might of the Persian war hammer would strike, so in 482 BCE a plan was put in place to build a huge fleet of ships to tackle the Persian sea offensive. However, Athens realised it could not fight on both sea and land and so sought an alliance of sorts with one of the other Greek states that had rejected Persian advances – Sparta.

The Spartans were a hardy breed, born fighters who trained from childhood to kill with brutal efficiency. Yet despite the cultural and political differences between the two peoples, they agreed a coalition.

The alliance soon learned that Xerxes' army, believed to have been between 70,000 and 300,000 strong, would march through the narrow southern pass of Thermopylae. A plan was devised to funnel the Persians into the pass, bleed them dry, and then drive them out of Greece forever.

### MIGHT IN SHEER NUMBERS

While the account of Greek historian Herodotus places the forces at Xerxes I's command at more than 2.5 million men, that figure was more likely to have been in between the region of 70–300,000. This army was drawn from all across the empire and included his elite warrior sect, the Immortals.

### GATHERING GREEK ALLIES

Don't let Frank Miller's comic *300*, or Zack Snyder's film of the same name, fool you – although 300 Spartans did defend the pass at Thermopylae, they weren't alone. In fact, they were joined by about 7,000 more men from places including Thespieae, Thebes, Mycenae, and Corinth.





## Greek city-states

**TROOPS:** 7,000  
**CAVALRY:** 0



### KING LEONIDAS I LEADER

Plutarch tells us that the fearsome Spartan leader uttered the iconic phrase "Tonight, we dine in Hell!" at the battle.

**Strengths** Superior infantry tactics and training; use of the Phalanx.

**Weakness** Sparta was forbidden from going to battle during Carneia so could only send 300 men.



### THESPIAN ARMY KEY UNIT

King Demophilus of Thespieae brought 700 of his men to support the Spartans at Thermopylae.

**Strengths** Strong allies with the state of Sparta, Thespian men worked well with the Spartans.

**Weakness** Demophilus, like Leonidas, fought with his men at Thermopylae so was vulnerable from the start.



### THE PHALANX KEY WEAPON

This battle tactic (later mirrored by the Romans) saw the Greeks create an impenetrable 'box' of overlapped shields and spears.

**Strengths** Being protected against archer volleys enabled Spartans to push infantry and cavalry back.

**Weakness** Could be slow-moving, allowing cavalry to circle and attack.

### 2 THE PERSIANS STRIKE THE NARROW PATH

Tired of waiting, Xerxes orders a contingent of his forces - consisting of 10,000 Cissians and Median soldiers - to attack the waiting enemy. The Persians are now committing a significant proportion of men to a frontal assault on the Greeks. However, the Greeks' geographical advantage and superior tactics drive the Persians back.

### 1 PERSIAN LANDFALL AND ARCHERY ATTACK

After four years of construction, the Persian fleet arrives on the Greek coast with an army of infantry, archers, and cavalry somewhere between 70,000 and 300,000 men. After setting up a camp on the shore, the Persians unleash a flurry of arrow volleys into the Greek warriors waiting at the Western Gate. With their shields to protect them, the volleys, fired from a distance of about 100 metres (330 feet), barely scratch the defenders of the pass.

### 3 THE PERSIANS REACH THE PHOCIAN WALL

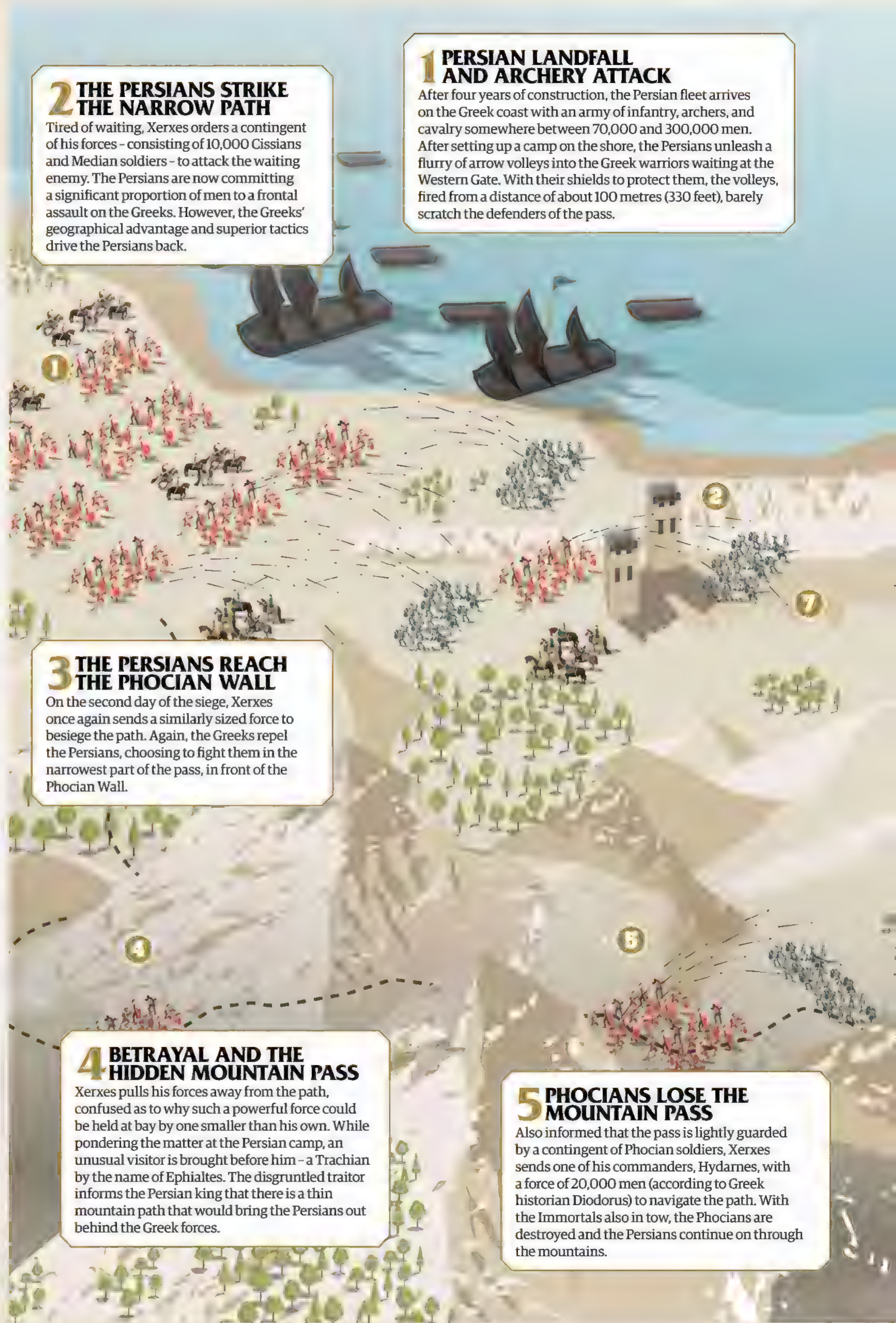
On the second day of the siege, Xerxes once again sends a similarly sized force to besiege the path. Again, the Greeks repel the Persians, choosing to fight them in the narrowest part of the pass, in front of the Phocian Wall.

### 4 BETRAYAL AND THE HIDDEN MOUNTAIN PASS

Xerxes pulls his forces away from the path, confused as to why such a powerful force could be held at bay by one smaller than his own. While pondering the matter at the Persian camp, an unusual visitor is brought before him - a Trachian by the name of Ephialtes. The disgruntled traitor informs the Persian king that there is a thin mountain path that would bring the Persians out behind the Greek forces.

### 5 PHOCIANS LOSE THE MOUNTAIN PASS

Also informed that the pass is lightly guarded by a contingent of Phocian soldiers, Xerxes sends one of his commanders, Hydarnes, with a force of 20,000 men (according to Greek historian Diodorus) to navigate the path. With the Immortals also in tow, the Phocians are destroyed and the Persians continue on through the mountains.





## 10 THE PERSIANS INVADE GREECE

With the initial Greek resistance crushed, Xerxes' Persian forces swarm into Greece by land and raze almost every city and town they pass through on their way to Athens. The city itself is evacuated and the bulk of the Athenian people and its armies hold up at the Isthmus of Corinth. The Greeks then concoct a plan to lure the Persians into the straits of Salamis, which, along with help from the elements, sees most of Xerxes' fleet destroyed. Coupled with a Greek land victory at Plataea less than a year later, it effectively ends the invasion.

## 9 RETREAT TO KOLONOS HILL

Xerxes' forces destroy the Phocian Wall, forcing the Greeks to continue fighting off the Persians past the Eastern Gate and out towards the other side of the narrow path. The Immortals now appear from the mountain path, which forces the remaining Greek forces to withdraw to the top of the nearby Kolonos Hill. The Persians then hammer the Greeks with wave after wave of arrows. They are butchered down to the last man.

## 8 KING LEONIDAS FALLS IN BATTLE

This attack on the Greek position is the most savage of the Persian siege, and with more forces added over time and the threat of the Immortals arriving behind them at any moment, the Greek advantage begins to fade. Volleys of arrows strike the Greek position as the fighting intensifies. King Leonidas, who was leading his men from the front, is killed in the assault. The Greeks are able to recover his body, but Xerxes senses victory and the Persians push on.

## 7 THE PERSIANS STRIKE AGAIN

Xerxes doesn't strike immediately on the third day of the siege, delaying his action to give the Immortals time to outflank the Greeks. As the morning grows brighter, he sends 10,000 infantry and cavalry to strike the Phocian Wall again. This time the Greeks meet them in a wider section of the path, presumably to increase the killing.

## 6 THE GREEK COUNCIL OF WAR

News of the pass being compromised soon reaches the Greeks, and all the commanders, including Spartan ruler King Leonidas I, meet to discuss the ramifications. Some withdraw, while others remain to stave off the Persian onslaught.

## Achaemenid Empire of Persia

**TROOPS:** 70-300,000

**CAVALRY:** 14-60,000



## XERXES I OF PERSIA

### LEADER

Xerxes' fevered army-building was the result of a prophetic dream urging him to go to war with the defiant Greeks.

**Strengths** Sheer numbers, his use of cavalry, and the variety of troops – including the Immortals.

**Weakness** The narrow pass at Thermopylae made it difficult for such a large army to progress.



## THE IMMORTALS

### KEY UNIT

The Immortals were Xerxes' elite bodyguards and were skilled in close-quarters combat and archery.

**Strengths** According to Herodotus, the Immortals were always 10,000-strong in number.

**Weakness** Fought wrapped only in cloth (they didn't wear any armour) and used wicker shields.

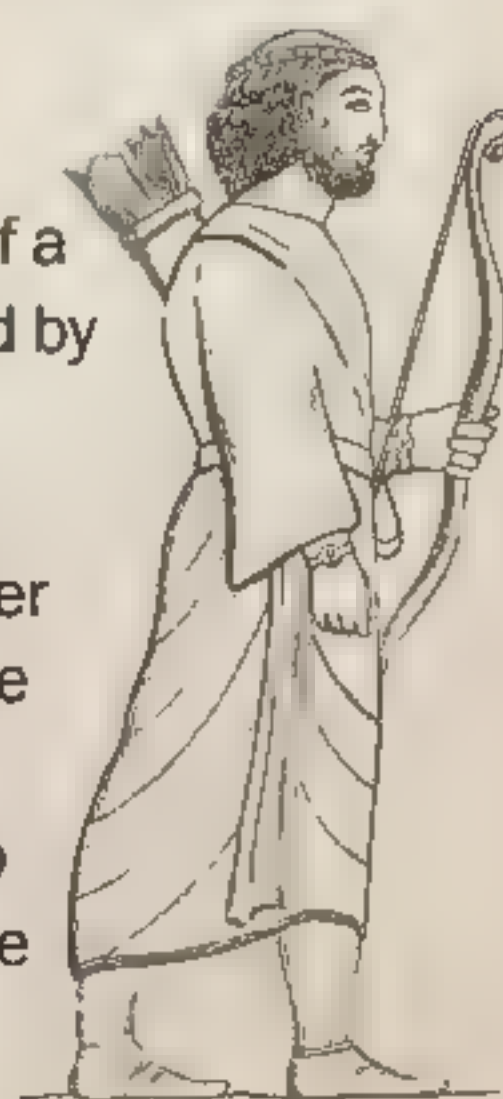
## COMPOSITE BOW

### KEY WEAPON

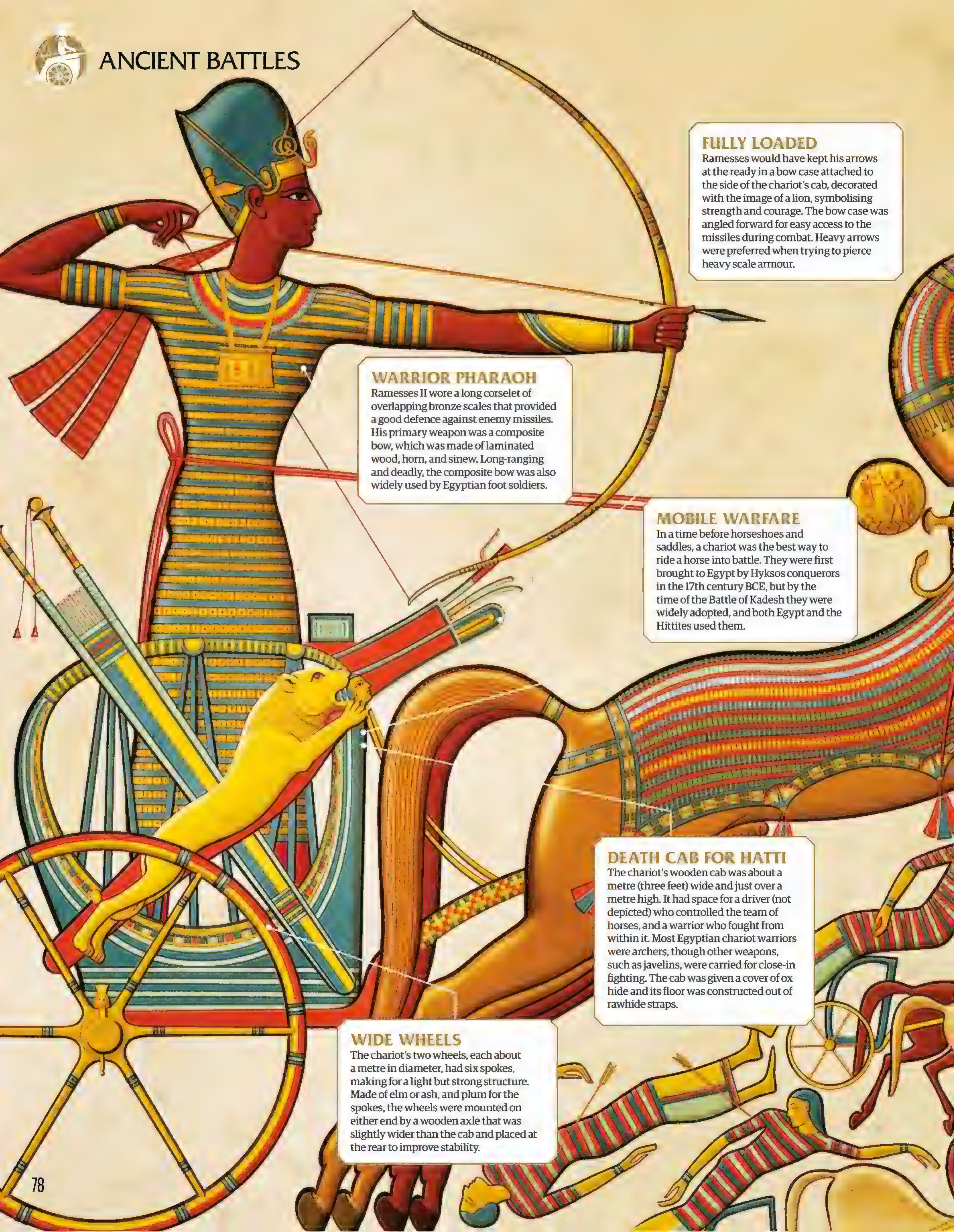
A popular ranged weapon, it was one of a number of bows used by the Persians.

**Strengths** Could be crafted to yield greater strength and distance for its user.

**Weakness** Sensitive to moisture, it could lose its power in wet conditions.







## FULLY LOADED

Ramesses would have kept his arrows at the ready in a bow case attached to the side of the chariot's cab, decorated with the image of a lion, symbolising strength and courage. The bow case was angled forward for easy access to the missiles during combat. Heavy arrows were preferred when trying to pierce heavy scale armour.

## WARRIOR PHARAOH

Ramesses II wore a long corselet of overlapping bronze scales that provided a good defence against enemy missiles. His primary weapon was a composite bow, which was made of laminated wood, horn, and sinew. Long-ranging and deadly, the composite bow was also widely used by Egyptian foot soldiers.

## MOBILE WARFARE

In a time before horseshoes and saddles, a chariot was the best way to ride a horse into battle. They were first brought to Egypt by Hyksos conquerors in the 17th century BCE, but by the time of the Battle of Kadesh they were widely adopted, and both Egypt and the Hittites used them.

## DEATH CAB FOR HATTI

The chariot's wooden cab was about a metre (three feet) wide and just over a metre high. It had space for a driver (not depicted) who controlled the team of horses, and a warrior who fought from within it. Most Egyptian chariot warriors were archers, though other weapons, such as javelins, were carried for close-in fighting. The cab was given a cover of ox hide and its floor was constructed out of rawhide straps.

## WIDE WHEELS

The chariot's two wheels, each about a metre in diameter, had six spokes, making for a light but strong structure. Made of elm or ash, and plum for the spokes, the wheels were mounted on either end by a wooden axle that was slightly wider than the cab and placed at the rear to improve stability.



**RAW HORSEPOWER**

A two-horse team was yoked to a draught pole and pulled the chariot behind it. A top speed of up to 29 kilometres (18 miles) per hour might be attained over short distances. For protection, each horse was provided with armour coats of bronze scales.

**ICONIC BATTLE**

Ramesses was keen to celebrate his own heroism at Kadesh, so he commissioned memorials all over his kingdom, making it one of the best-recorded battles of ancient times. The relief from Ramesses' own royal tomb often depicts the pharaoh crushing the Hittites under the wheel of his chariot, despite his actual victory being much more modest.

# BATTLE OF KADESH

**THIS SAVAGE STRUGGLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITNESSED ONE OF THE LARGEST CHARIOT FIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF WAR**



Written by Marc DeSantis

**T**he city of Kadesh was of great strategic importance in the 13th century BCE. Located in the Orontes River valley in the Levant, it controlled the Egyptian invasion route into northern Syria.

But Kadesh had long chafed against Egyptian domination, and one of its earlier monarchs had been a ringleader of a major rebellion against Egypt in the 15th century BCE. The uprising had not ended well, with warrior-pharaoh Thutmose III crushing the rebel Canaanite coalition handily at the Battle of Megiddo in 1457 BCE.

The importance of Kadesh survived this defeat, and the city became a bone of contention between the two Bronze Age superpowers — Egypt and the rising Hittite Empire, based in Anatolia. In the early 14th century BCE, the Hittites, under King Suppiluliumas the Great, had smashed Mitanni, the erstwhile great power that had dominated northern Syria, and Mitanni's old vassals bent their knees to him instead. When Kadesh was also taken by Suppiluliumas, the Egyptians were forced to act. However, while Hittite power waxed in the Middle East, the Egyptian position in the region was seriously weakened.

Hatti, as the Hittite kingdom was known, had its heartland in what is central Turkey today, with its capital at Hattusa. The Hittites were tough and ferocious warriors, and the primary strike force of their army was a massive corps of chariots. While Hatti increased in power in the latter 14th century BCE, Egypt had been unwilling to react to the northern challenge, preferring instead to rely on client states to look after its interests on the frontier in Syria. One such kingdom, Amurru, used this to grow at the expense of Egypt's other

vassals in the region and was, for all intents and purposes, an independent state by the end of the 13th century BCE. Like wayward Kadesh, its rise was a symptom of the deterioration of Egyptian prestige in Asia. The power of the distant pharaoh was insufficiently respected by many of his wavering vassals.

Pharaoh Seti I tried to reverse this decline. He personally led an army into Canaan and Phoenicia and delivered a sharp check to Hittite expansion in Syria by recapturing Kadesh. But the city quickly slipped from Egypt's grasp and once more allied itself with the Hittite Empire. If Egyptian control in Syria was ever to be re-established, Kadesh would have to be brought back into the fold once and for all.

Seti died in 1279 BCE, succeeded on the throne by his son, Ramesses II. Like his father, Ramesses was determined to make Egyptian power felt in Asia once again. First, Kadesh would have to be brought to heel. In April and May 1274 BCE, he assembled his army at Pi-Ramesses in the Nile Delta. When his preparations were finished, he marched out of Egypt at the head of an army of some 20,000 soldiers and 2,000 chariots divided into four large corps.

The Hittites were certain to respond to this move, as Kadesh was vital to their position in Syria too. The power of the Hittites was such that their king, Muwatalli II, could call upon not just his own army in a time of war but also those of myriad allied lesser kings and princes. For the upcoming campaign, in addition to his own soldiers, King Muwatalli was accompanied by the troops of 18 allies and vassals. The stage was now set for the greatest battle of the Bronze Age.

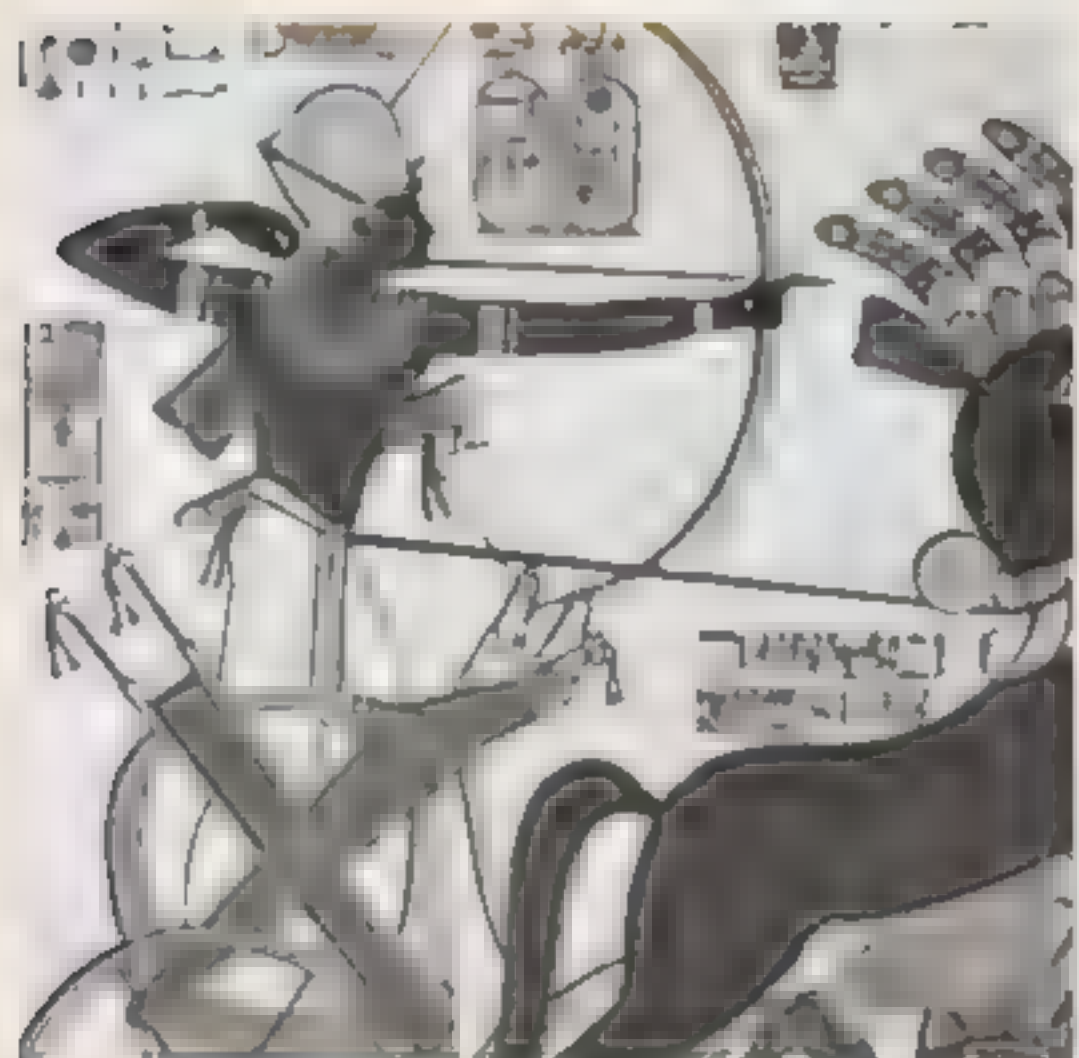




# ANCIENT BATTLES

## Egyptians

**CHARIOTS** 2,000  
(4,000 MEN)  
**INFANTRY** 16,000



## RAMESSES II

### LEADER

Ramesses was utterly determined to restore Egyptian power in Syria by capturing the city of Kadesh. However, he was overconfident and only too late realised that the Hittites were closer than he suspected.

**Strengths** Fearless, ambitious, charismatic, and bold.

**Weakness** Young, inexperienced in warfare, and impetuous.



## CHARIOTS

### KEY UNIT

Chariots, light and fast, comprised the elite arm of the Egyptian army and brought mobile firepower to the ancient battlefield.

**Strengths** From these swift vehicles, archers rained death down upon Egypt's foes.

**Weakness** Egyptian chariots were lighter than those of the Hittites and would have a hard time standing up to them in close combat.

## COMPOSITE BOW

### KEY WEAPON

The composite bow, made of wood, horn, and sinew, was a compact yet powerful weapon able to launch arrows over long distances.

**Strengths** A skilled archer could shoot his arrows quickly and accurately in the heat of battle.

**Weakness** A limited supply of arrows, and accuracy might suffer while shooting from a moving chariot.

## 1 THE EGYPTIANS ARRIVE AT KADESH

After a month-long journey of about 1,500 kilometres (932 miles) through Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon, the leading division of the Egyptian army, Amon, personally commanded by Ramesses II himself, emerges from the forest of Robawi and comes upon the city of Kadesh in Syria. Well protected by the Orontes River, as well as by a moat dug by its inhabitants to connect the river to one of its tributaries, it is surrounded by water and will be difficult to take.

## 3 THE TWO SHASU

Two Shasu nomads present themselves before the pharaoh. The Hittites, they claim, are nowhere nearby, but instead are about 190 kilometres (118 miles) away in the vicinity of Aleppo. The overconfident Ramesses believes the tribesmen. He continues north and makes camp to the north of Kadesh.

## 6 THE ROUTE OF THE RA DIVISION

The marching chariots and infantry of the Ra Division are routed by the sudden onset of the enemy thundering over the plain of Kadesh. The survivors flee to the safety of the Amon camp, which is soon brought under assault by the surging Hittites.

## 7 RAMESSES COUNTERATTACKS

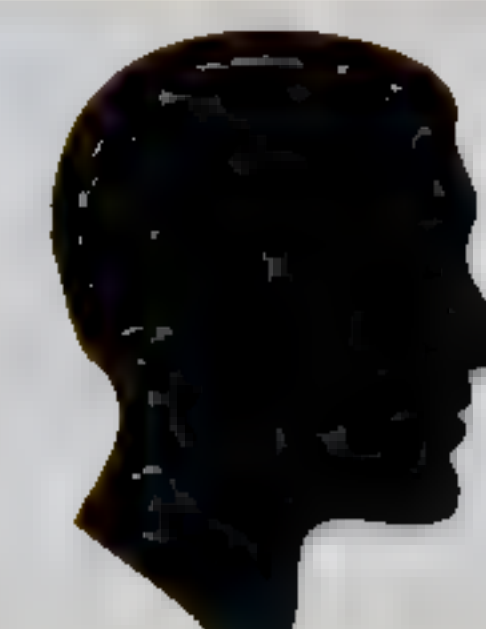
With catastrophe looming, Ramesses personally leads a desperate counterattack, riding at the head of the 500 chariots of the Amon Corps. Egyptian chariot archers shower arrows upon the lance-armed Hittite chariot warriors. Though badly outnumbered, the indomitable Ramesses attacks six times and begins to contain the Hittite chariot attack. Muwatalli, seeing his own forces wavering, sends a second wave of 1,000 chariots to their aid.





## Hittites and the Allied Coalition

**CHARIOTS** 3,500  
(10,500 MEN)  
**INFANTRY** 37,000



### MUWATALLI II

#### LEADER

Muwatalli, son of Mursilis II, was a strong king with a tight grip on his kingdom. To better oversee operations along the Syrian frontier, he moved his capital to Tarhuntassa (in central Anatolia) to be closer to the fighting.

**Strengths** A capable commander and very brave.

**Weakness** Underestimated  
Ramesses II.



### CHARIOTS

#### KEY UNIT

Each vehicle carried three men: a driver, an elite spear-armed warrior, and a shield bearer. Most often, the chariots were used to run down enemy troops in a shock attack.

**Strengths** Bearing three crew instead of just two, Hittite chariots were heavier and more robust than Egyptian vehicles.

**Weakness** They had limited firepower and were slower than their Egyptian counterparts.

### THRUSTING SPEAR

#### KEY WEAPON

The 2m (6ft)-long thrusting spear was a powerful weapon, especially when used during a charge. At Kadesh, however, the Hittite chariots were likely at a steep disadvantage when confronted by the Egyptian chariot archers.

**Strengths** Long reach and better in close combat than bow-armed Egyptian chariot warriors.

**Weakness** Badly out-ranged by an enemy using a bow.

### 2 CROSSING THE ORONTES

Ramesses has the Amon division cross the Orontes at Shabtuna. The other three divisions, Ra, Ptah, and Set, are strung out far behind, still making their way through the forest. Ramesses expects to reunite soon with the Ne'arin, an elite unit of the Egyptian army that he had earlier sent along a different route up the coast with orders to meet him at Kadesh.

### 4 THE HITTITES WAIT

Muwatalli, at the head of an enormous army of 37,000 infantry and 3,500 chariots, is in fact waiting for Ramesses on the other side of the Orontes behind Kadesh, hidden from Egyptian eyes by the high mound upon which the city sits. The king is made aware of Ramesses' approach, probably by the same Shasu nomads who had earlier misled the pharaoh. Muwatalli then sends out scouts to locate the precise position of the Egyptians – two of them are captured by Ramesses' men.

### 5 MUWATALLI POUNCES

From the captured scouts Ramesses learns of the Hittites' true whereabouts. Realising how much danger his army is now in, he hastily convenes a council of his senior officers. An urgent summons is also sent to the lagging Ptah and Set divisions ten kilometres (six miles) to the south, where they are busy fording the Orontes, to hurry to the aid of their pharaoh. Meanwhile, Muwatalli launches a massive flanking assault, crossing the Orontes just south of Kadesh with a force of 2,500 chariots.

### 9 COUNTING THE COST

Losses are extremely heavy for both sides. Though Ramesses has won a tactical victory, strategically the battle is really a draw, and the pharaoh knows that he will never succeed in capturing Kadesh. Ramesses commemorates the battle and his own heroism with memorials all over his kingdom, making it one of the best-recorded engagements of ancient times. Sixteen years later, Egypt and the Hittite Empire will make a lasting peace.

### 8 THE HITTITES ARE REPULSED

The Hittite reinforcements strike at the Amon camp, hoping to cause the Egyptians to break off their combat with the first group of chariots. But before they reach it they are met by the newly arrived Ne'arin, who bring the second group of Hittite chariots to a grinding halt. In a ferocious melee most of the Hittites are killed, with only a handful of survivors escaping back over the river.





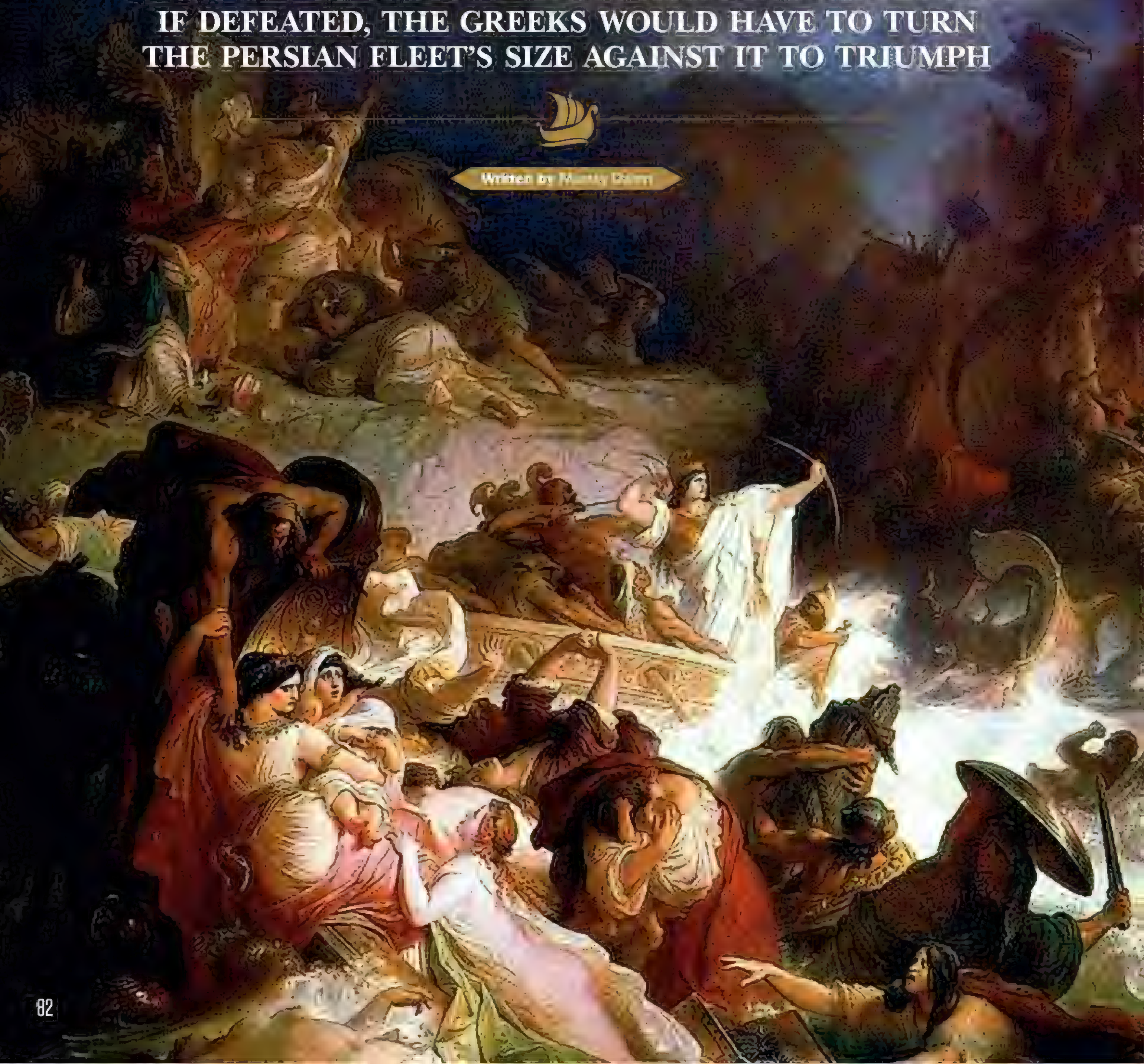
ANCIENT BATTLES

# BATTLE OF SALAMIS

OUTNUMBERED AND FACING DEATH OR ENSLAVEMENT  
IF DEFEATED, THE GREEKS WOULD HAVE TO TURN  
THE PERSIAN FLEET'S SIZE AGAINST IT TO TRIUMPH



Written by Matty Dunn





In the summer of 480 BCE, the Persian King Xerxes I invaded mainland Greece with a massive army rumoured to number 5 million men aboard 1,200 warships. No one today believes those numbers, but the invasion was the largest Greece had ever seen. Ostensibly, it was to punish two Greek cities, Athens and Eretria, for their part in a revolt of Persian vassal states in Ionia 15 years earlier. The resources brought to bear, however, reveal that the conquest of Greece was Xerxes' real intention, with the aim of adding it to his western provinces. This quest would reach its climax at Salamis.

As the Persians advanced across the Hellespont and down through Greece, they reached the pass of Thermopylae by land and Artemisium by sea. There the Greeks planned to delay the Persian advance. Up to that point the Greek states (such as Macedon) had had little choice but to succumb to Persian dominance and join with their new master or be destroyed. The states that collaborated with Persia were known as 'medisers' (the Medes being synonymous with the Persians since both came from the same homeland). An earlier plan to meet and delay the Persian advance further north, at Tempe, had to be abandoned, which reveals the major problem faced by the Greeks - unity.

### AN ALLIANCE OF CITY-STATES

Greece at this time was a very loose collection of city-states governed in different ways and with different languages and interests. The cities spent most of their time warring with each other over land and religious disputes. The two largest city-states, Athens and Sparta, were atypical of the majority of other cities: most were smaller and looked to Sparta and Athens (in that order) for leadership. Sparta, centred in the Peloponnese, had a unique dual-monarchy system of government and was primarily concerned with maintaining a military system to control its lands. These were run via a system of state slavery called helotry, which allowed the Spartan citizens (Spartiates) to concentrate on military training. Sparta was therefore the natural military leader of Greece. Unfortunately, their concerns were mostly localised (helots outnumbered Spartans by up to 20 to one), and it took a great deal of persuasion to get the Spartans to venture out of the Peloponnese.

Athens, by contrast, controlled a large land base in Attica and had a fledgling political system, democracy, which was barely 30 years old. Athens was a hotbed of capitalism and new ideas in literature and philosophy. She was confident and self-reliant, and she was not afraid to stand up to the Persians.

This 1868 painting shows moments of the battle: Xerxes jumping from his throne and Artemisia firing arrows into the Greeks.

### OPPOSING FORCES

#### THE GREEK CITY-STATES

LEADERS  
Themistocles

TROOPS  
378

VS

#### PERSIANS

LEADERS  
Xerxes I

TROOPS  
1,207





# ANCIENT BATTLES



Xerxes became king after his father, Darius I, died in 486 BCE



The death of Xerxes' brother Ariabignes during the battle



Themistocles, an Athenian statesman with long-term vision and powers of persuasion

the first attempt to punish its involvement in the Ionian Revolt ten years earlier at the Battle of Marathon, where Athens almost single-handedly defeated a Persian army - one much smaller than the force the Greeks would face at Salamis. Athens probably knew that other attempts would follow and developed a navy of triremes. The man most responsible for this was the populist Athenian statesman Themistocles.

Thermopylae was never intended to be a decisive stand, even though the defeat of the 300 Spartans (all the city sent) has gone down in history as such. There were also 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans present, but their sacrifice has been all but ignored. The other cities' soldiers had already withdrawn, and fierce debate ensued over keeping the alliance together. The Spartans, along with the other states of the Peloponnese, were in favour of withdrawing to their peninsula, building a wall across the Isthmus of Corinth and defending their homeland. At the same time as Thermopylae, the combined navy of Greek triremes had gathered at Artemisium. The Greeks

had 271 triremes according to the historian Herodotus (our best source for the Persian Wars). This fleet was dominated by the 127 ships from Athens. Facing them were perhaps 800 Persian ships.

The Greeks were massively outnumbered, but they had advantages. The Persians had already lost one-third of their fleet due to storms and not knowing the weather patterns of the western Aegean Sea. At Artemisium the Persians despatched 200 ships to round the island of Euboea and cut off the Greek retreat, but these too were lost.

## “ATHENS WAS A HOTBED OF CAPITALISM AND NEW IDEAS. SHE WAS CONFIDENT AND PUT HERSELF FORWARD AS SPARTA'S EQUAL”

Once the position at Thermopylae had been overrun, the Greek navy withdrew from Artemisium. Due to the majority of the fleet being from Athens, the Athenians requested that they now assemble in the straits of Salamis, an island off the coast of Attica, near Athens. The fleet, as well as ships from other states, came to Salamis. Some cities contributed a single trireme, but this was still a major resource. Athens contributed 180 triremes; the next closest (Corinth) contributed 40, showing the power and wealth of Athens. Unity was the major concern. One way of ensuring it can be seen in Athens allowing the Spartan admiral Eurybiades to take overall command, even though Sparta only contributed 16 ships. The Persians were close on the heels (or keels) of the Greeks, and Themistocles knew that he would not need to hold the fleet together for very long before a decisive engagement could be fought. The position of Salamis and the tactics of the battle should be attributed to Themistocles' genius.

### HELP FROM THE GODS

One aspect of Greek life was that the gods needed to be consulted before almost every action. The most important oracle for consulting the will of the gods was located at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi; Greek cities constantly sought advice from the oracle (usually interpreted as obscure

poems with often ambiguous meanings). The oracle at Delphi had advised the Athenians that “the wooden wall only shall not fall”. Many at Athens thought this meant the wooden wall that surrounded the Acropolis, but Themistocles interpreted the oracle differently to mean that the hulls of Athens' fleet were the wooden walls in which she should trust. What is more, Themistocles was able to persuade the majority of Athenians to follow him. Athens was now evacuated (to Troezen and the islands of Aegina and Salamis), and the Greeks prepared to defend the position in the straits of Salamis (a location also enigmatically suggested by the oracle). Herodotus' account is brought into question by the Decree of Themistocles, an inscription discovered in 1960 in Troezen, which suggests the plan to evacuate Athens and to defend Artemisium then Salamis was in place well before the invasion.

### ATHENS BURNS

Those at Athens who believed that the wooden wall surrounding the Acropolis would be their salvation soon learned their mistake. The Persian army advanced on the city and burned it to the ground. The giant snake that the priests of Athens said would rise and defend them failed to make an appearance. The Athenian population on Salamis and Aegina could only watch as the smoke from their burning homes rose into the sky. This must have steeled the resolve of many in the Greek fleet, but others wanted to flee - unity was still a problem. Herodotus tells us that the decision was made to withdraw from Salamis and defend the Isthmus of Corinth. Themistocles argued passionately against such a decision and was able to convince Eurybiades to fight at Salamis.

The Persian fleet massively outnumbered that of the Greek city-states despite her losses. She had started with 1,207 triremes (Herodotus mentions, but does not count, smaller craft such





# SALAMIS

Xerxes watches the  
Battle of Salamis from  
a nearby mountain







# ANCIENT BATTLES

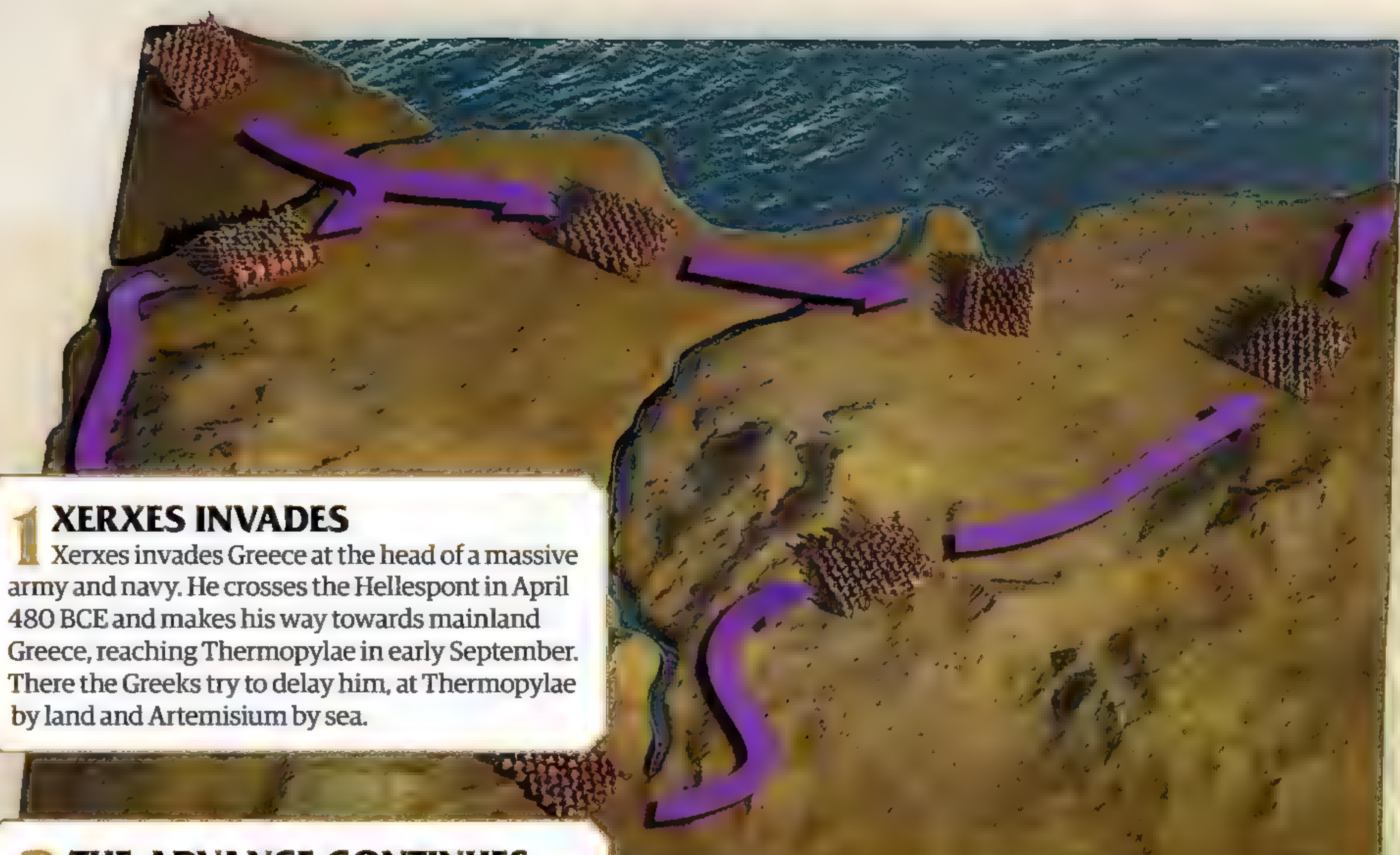
as pentekonteres - '50-oared' ships). Despite the losses on the journey to Salamis, Herodotus tells us that these were replaced with reinforcements. The number of 1,207 seems unbelievable to us (240,000 rowers alone), but the resources available to Xerxes were unimaginable, for his empire stretched from India to Turkey and Egypt to Armenia. Nonetheless, modern reconstructions put Xerxes' fleet at between 400 and 900 ships. The exact number of men per craft probably differed, but we have good statistics for Athenian triremes, with 14 hoplites and four archers per ship. We've used these numbers to extrapolate the crews of both sides, but we know that one ship from Samothrace, for instance, was manned with javelinmen rather than archers. If the numbers are even remotely accurate, the Persians had a massive fleet. However, its sheer scale also caused problems, namely that the fleet required a vast space in which to operate, and the Persian crews and their captains were sailing in unfamiliar waters leagues from home.

## A SLAUGHTER AT SALAMIS

To add to the obstacles facing the invaders, the geography around Salamis offered the smaller Greek fleet an advantage, as it funnelled ships into a narrow stretch of water. Therefore, if the Greeks could draw the Persians in, their superior numbers would be nullified. What is more, the Persians might foul one another's oars in their attempts to manoeuvre. At the same time, however, if the Persians despatched a fleet to the far side of the island, they could trap the Greek fleet. An alternative story is that Themistocles actually told the enemy that they could trap the Greek fleet in place, sending a slave to the Persians. In this way he ensured that the Greeks were trapped and therefore had to fight (the outcome he wanted).

At dawn the Greek fleet took up position in the straits of Salamis. Herodotus tells us that the Persian fleet immediately set upon them. Perhaps the Persians were already in position to attack the (surrounded) Greeks. The Greek ships checked their advance and began backing water. This was most probably a deliberate tactic to lure the Persians further into the narrower waters of the

Chaos unfolds as the enemy fleets engage



### 1 XERXES INVADES

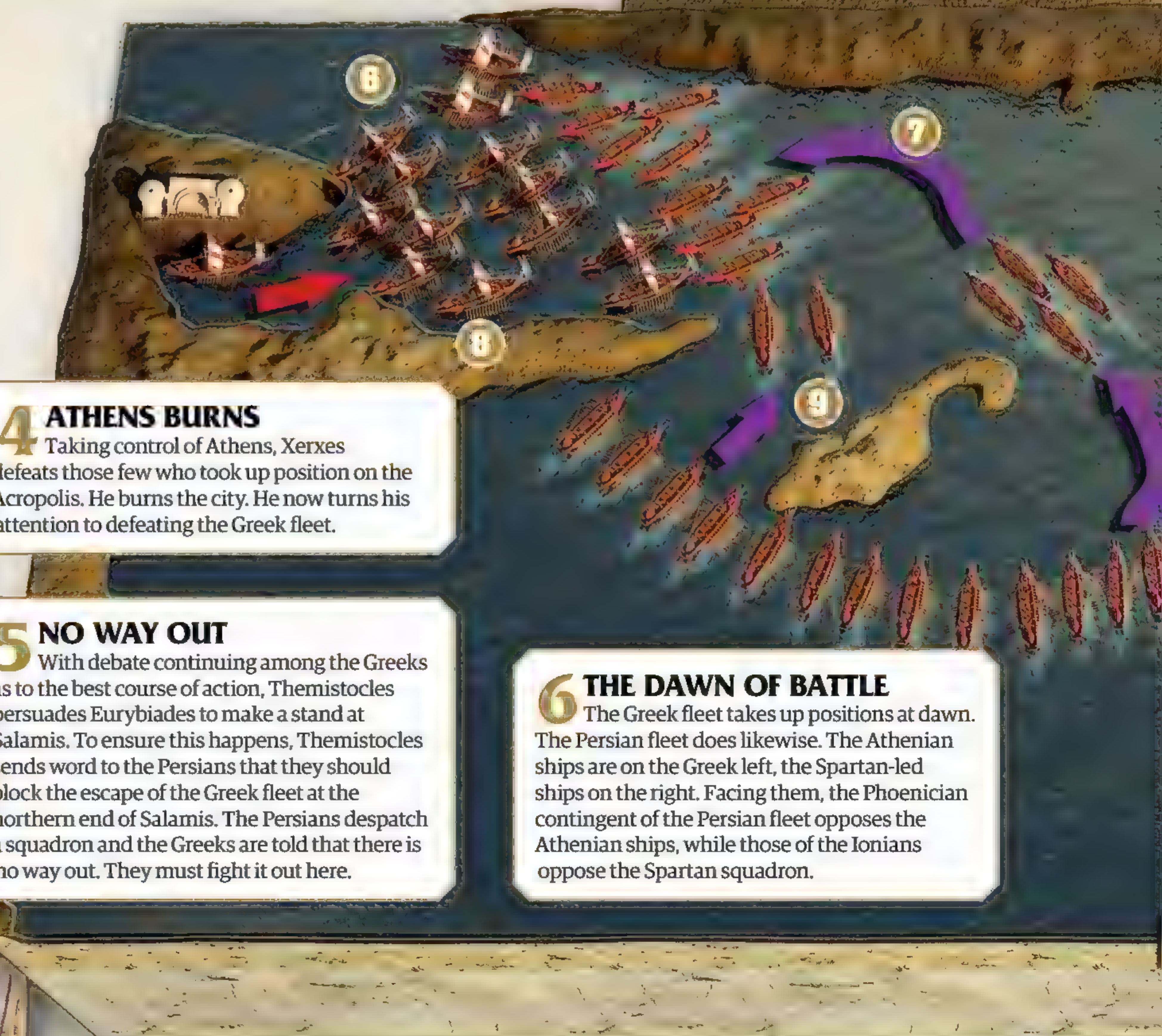
Xerxes invades Greece at the head of a massive army and navy. He crosses the Hellespont in April 480 BCE and makes his way towards mainland Greece, reaching Thermopylae in early September. There the Greeks try to delay him, at Thermopylae by land and Artemisium by sea.

### 2 THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

With the defeat at Thermopylae, the Greeks withdraw from Artemisium. The Persian fleet has suffered losses in storms (of perhaps as many as 600 ships). These are replaced by reinforcements.

### 3 LAST STAND AT SALAMIS

The Greek fleet withdraws to Salamis, off the coast of Attica. There they are joined by other Greek ships. Fierce debate on whether to defend Salamis or withdraw further and defend the Isthmus of Corinth ensues. The Persians, having detoured to Thermopylae to see the visible signs of the defeat of the Greeks there, move on to Athens by both land and sea. Athens' population is largely evacuated.



### 4 ATHENS BURNS

Taking control of Athens, Xerxes defeats those few who took up position on the Acropolis. He burns the city. He now turns his attention to defeating the Greek fleet.

### 5 NO WAY OUT

With debate continuing among the Greeks as to the best course of action, Themistocles persuades Eurybiades to make a stand at Salamis. To ensure this happens, Themistocles sends word to the Persians that they should block the escape of the Greek fleet at the northern end of Salamis. The Persians despatch a squadron and the Greeks are told that there is no way out. They must fight it out here.

### 6 THE DAWN OF BATTLE

The Greek fleet takes up positions at dawn. The Persian fleet does likewise. The Athenian ships are on the Greek left, the Spartan-led ships on the right. Facing them, the Phoenician contingent of the Persian fleet opposes the Athenian ships, while those of the Ionians oppose the Spartan squadron.





**10 THE ROUT IS COMPLETE**  
 Seeing his fleet destroyed before him, Xerxes is enraged, executing those captains who are able to make their way to him to make their excuses. The Persian fleet is in tatters and tries to flee to Phalerum. Most ships are caught by fresh vessels from Aegina. Some Persian ships ram their comrades in a bid to convince the Greeks that they've changed sides.

**9 STICKING TO THE PLAN**  
 The Greek fleet, acting to a preordained plan, perform in concert and begin turning the Persian fleet. Parts of the Persian fleet attempt to flee, only to become entangled with their own vessels behind. This makes them easy prey for their pursuers. Greeks who fall in the water swim to the island of Salamis. Members of the Persian fleet, the majority of whom cannot swim, drown or are killed in the water.

**7 IT'S A TRAP!**  
 The Greek fleet rows out and the Persian fleet immediately looks to engage them. The Greek fleet then begins to back water, luring the greater numbers of the Persian ships further into the narrower waters of the straits. There the massive Persian fleet will be unable to manoeuvre properly.

**8 LET THE RAMMING BEGIN**  
 An Athenian ship (or one from Aegina) is the first to ram an enemy vessel. Other ships from both sides now move to ram one another. The archers and javelinmen on the decks of the triremes rain down missiles on enemy ships. Once a ship is rammed, the hoplite marines from one vessel board the rammed ship and a battle ensues between the infantrymen of each vessel.





## ANCIENT BATTLES

straits. One of the Athenian ships, commanded by Ameinias of Pallene (one of the ten *demes*, or districts, of Attica), then rammed a Persian ship and the battle proper began.

Herodotus' account is confused, and he highlights different moments of the action (as well as recording various viewpoints). Modern commentators have preferred to break down the battle into clear phases where squadrons of each fleet made decisions and acted en bloc. However, some of Herodotus' details suggest that confusion may be a better way of thinking about the battle.

Men from the island of Aegina claimed that they were the first to ram the enemy. Modern reconstructions see three squadrons – Athenian, allied and Spartan-led – but the details must be taken from Herodotus. He tells us the Athenians faced the Phoenicians stationed on the Persian left

wing, closest to Eleusis. The Spartans (probably with ships from the remainder of the Peloponnese) faced the Ionian ships on the Persian right wing (closest to Piraeus). These details are confusing – Eleusis is north of Salamis and so would be the Persian right wing; Piraeus to the south would make it the Persian left. Perhaps Herodotus was describing the positions from the Greek perspective (so on the Greek left the Athenians faced the Phoenicians and on the Greek right they faced the Ionians).

Another advantage the Greek fleet had over the Persians was a coherent plan. It's possible that a lone ship rammed the enemy when all the others were backing water according to a preordained plan, but the Greeks on the whole acted in concert. On the Persian side, each contingent seems to have acted alone. Ionian ships

may have held back since Themistocles had sent word to them encouraging them to defect. And so each Persian contingent, singly, was no match for the Greek ships in familiar waters and where their smaller numbers were turned into an advantage. Persian commanders may also have acted rashly to try and gain the approval of their king.

### EYES OF THE KING

Xerxes was not aboard any ship but instead had a throne set up on the mainland from which to watch the battle, perhaps on Mount Heraklion or Mount Aegaleos. His commanders were determined to fight more bravely under his eye (and thereby earn his praise and perhaps reward or promotion). Herodotus names two men who gained promotion in this way, Theomestor and Phylacus, but the most famous was Artemisia,





the female commander from Halicarnassus. She commanded five ships, but to avoid an Athenian ship chasing her, she rammed another Persian ship. The pursuit stopped (assuming they were in fact Greek or had changed sides) but Xerxes, seeing her action, commented that "my men have turned into women, my women into men". This anecdote is further complicated by the fact the Athenians had offered a reward for the capture of Artemisia - a female commander was something they could apparently not tolerate.

Many Persian ships were lost; Herodotus tells us that many in the Persian fleet could not swim, unlike the Greeks, who swam to the island of Salamis. The greatest losses occurred when

the first Persian ships to engage tried to retreat and became fouled in the ships behind them. Xerxes was apoplectic with rage as he saw his fleet destroyed before his eyes. He is said to have beheaded captains on the spot who came to him to try and explain why the battle had not gone as expected. The remnants of the Persian fleet made its way to Phalerum, chased by Aeginetan ships, but they were too few in number to constitute a threat. Xerxes' invasion was sunk. Without a fleet he could not provision his army properly, and his road home to Persia was threatened by the victorious Greek fleet. He soon fled back to Persia, leaving an army under Mardonius to be defeated at Plataea the following year.

The Greeks celebrate their victory over the Persians at Salamis, 480 BCE

**"HE IS SAID TO HAVE BEHEADED CAPTAINS ON THE SPOT WHO CAME TO HIM TO TRY AND EXPLAIN WHY THE BATTLE HAD NOT GONE AS EXPECTED"**







# BATTLE OF PYDNA

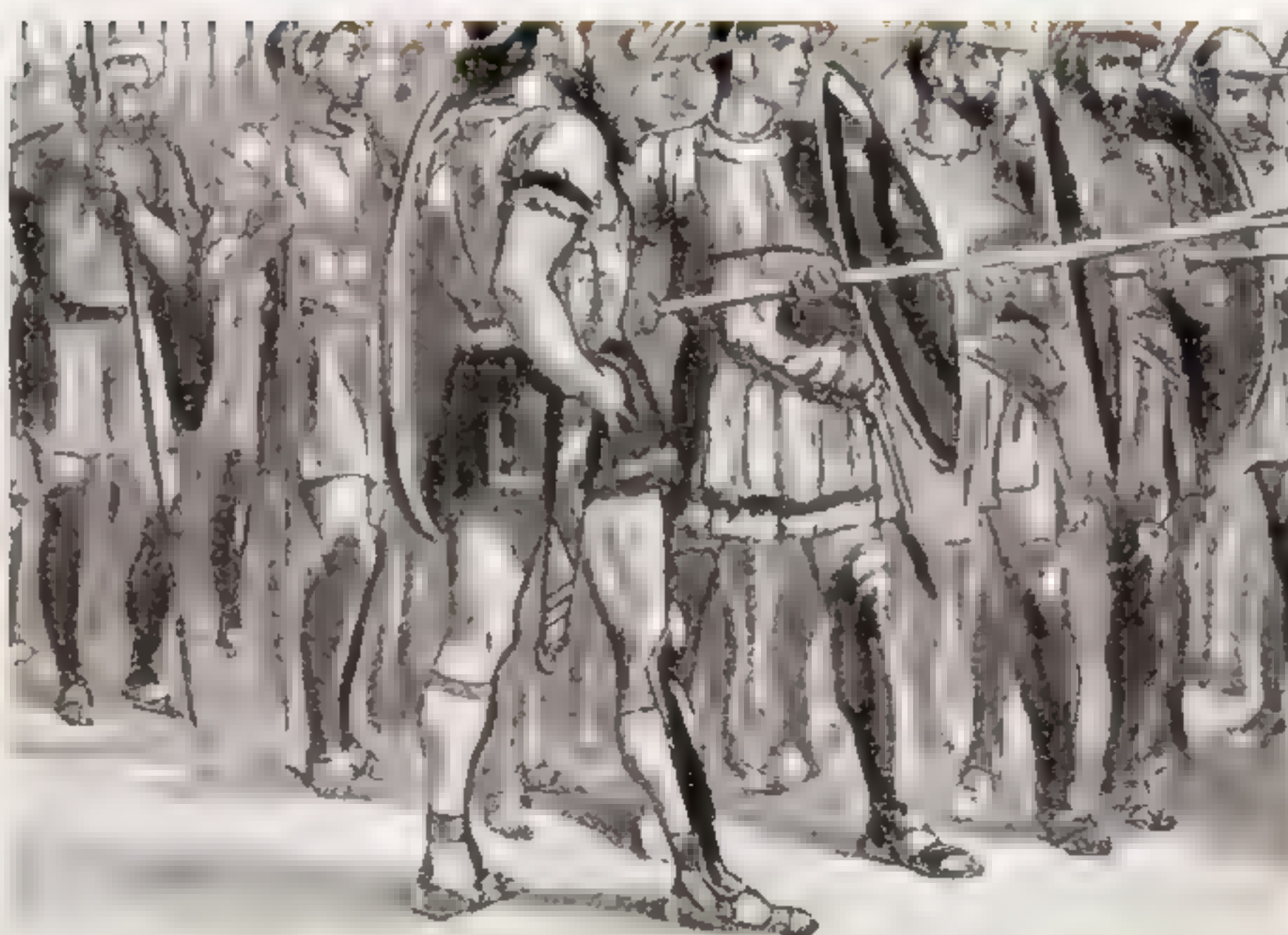
## A CLASH OF CONTRASTING CULTURES SPARKED MACEDONIA'S COLLAPSE AND THE RISE OF ROME



Written by John R. Coates

**T**he Kingdom of Macedonia was more than 150 years removed from the heyday of Alexander the Great when relations between King Perseus and the Roman Republic deteriorated. For the third time in four decades, the two powers prepared to face off against each other in a clash of classical civilisations. This time the result would be decisive.

The Third Macedonian War began with three years of indecisive manoeuvring in which both sides failed to deliver a knockout blow. The stalemate looked set to continue in 168 BCE when King Perseus took up a strong defensive position by the River Elpeus. Roman commander Lucius Aemilius Paullus tried to trick Perseus into



The Macedonian phalanx was extremely effective against a frontal assault but vulnerable to being attacked from the side or rear

moving from his advantageous spot, but a Roman deserter gave the game away. The Romans formed up in the foothills of Mount Olocrus instead, but no matter what they did, the Macedonians wouldn't budge.

Perseus was no fool. He knew that the wide, flat river plain suited his phalanx - a densely packed formation of infantry in which each man carried a sarissa, a pike tipped with an iron spike. The phalanx presented an almost-impenetrable barrier to a frontal assault. With the terrain on his side, Perseus was happy to hunker down and see whether the Romans would opt for a suicidal attack or a humiliating retreat.

The Romans were battle-hardened legionaries armed with a large shield (scutum) and a deadly





short sword (gladius). The secret of their success was their training and organisation. Legionaries were well-drilled in a variety of manoeuvres and fighting styles and could adapt to different battle conditions.

According to one account, the two contrasting armies might never have come to blows at Pydna were it not for a stubborn mule. At three o'clock in the afternoon, as both sides uneasily eyed each other at a distance, a packhorse escaped the Roman camp and tried to cross the river in front of the Macedonian army. Roman attempts to recapture the animal brought them far too close to the Macedonians, and a handful of soldiers from each side ended up coming to blows.

The initial scuffle soon escalated. Roman and Macedonian generals sent in reinforcements to back up their men. Before long the brawl had turned into a full-scale battle, and in their excitement the Romans advanced onto the ground that favoured the Macedonians. Perseus responded. He ordered his pikeman to advance in phalanx formation with sarissas lowered, aiming to sweep the Romans from the plain. For a time, it looked like they'd succeed. The Romans were unable to counter the Macedonian phalanx and its bristling pike wall. The pikemen trampled a Roman standard underfoot in their slow, unstoppable march forward.

But the further the pikemen advanced, the more uneven the ground became. Gradually, the flat river plain gave way to the foothills in which the Romans had sheltered. This undulating ground didn't suit the tightly packed phalanx, and gaps began to appear in the line - openings which the Romans could exploit.



Roman general Lucius Aemilius Paullus was rewarded with a triumphal procession in Rome

Although the phalanx was impenetrable from the front, it was vulnerable from any other angle of attack. The Romans piled into any breaks in the line. At close quarters, the Roman gladius was far deadlier than the unwieldy sarissa. Soon, the phalanx began to disintegrate.

King Perseus could have saved his army, even as the phalanx collapsed. His army was accompanied by thousands of cavalry, each rider armed with a thrusting spear and sword. The horsemen could have ridden down the legionaries and plugged the gaps in the phalanx. But they didn't. Instead, the cavalry watched from the distance as their brethren were cut down.

The Macedonian cavalry lived to fight another day, but the loss of over half of the Macedonian pikemen meant that they'd never get the

opportunity to engage the Romans in battle again. King Perseus fled from Pydna, but he later surrendered to Lucius Aemilius Paullus. Perseus was paraded in chains during a triumphal procession in Rome and died while under house arrest in Italy having never seen Macedonia again. The kingdom he once ruled was dissolved and Macedonia was turned into a Roman province.

The Battle of Pydna marked a changing of the guard as the powerful but rigid Macedonian phalanx was bested by the more flexible Roman legion. It needn't have ended that way, though. Had the Macedonian cavalry intervened, Perseus might still have won. Instead, the Roman Republic usurped Macedonia as the dominant power in Greece. The state that had famously ruled most of the known world was no more.





# THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA

HOW A DARING MOVE SECURED ONE OF ALEXANDER'S GREATEST TRIUMPHS

## A RELUCTANT ENEMY

Still feeling the sting of his defeat at Issus, Darius was desperate to avoid confrontation with Alexander again and sent repeated offers to cease his invasion of Persia, including offering half his empire. But Alexander refused, and the moment Darius saw the Macedonian king had broken through his front line he fled the scene of the battle.



**A**fter soundly defeating the Persians at Issus in 333 BCE, Alexander the Great's conquests led him to the Mediterranean coast, Egypt, and Syria. As he conquered his way around the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, Alexander once again turned his sights to toppling his primary enemy, the mighty Persian Empire. However, Darius III, king of Persia, had not been idle for the last two years; he had recruited men from all around his empire to form an army big enough to halt once and for all the advance of the unconquered king.

Despite commanding a large force, Darius, having felt the sting of Alexander's army once before, was eager to avoid conflict, and he offered to cede half the Persian Empire to Alexander to halt his invasion. Despite the protests of his generals, Alexander flatly refused the offer. With no options left, Darius prepared his forces for battle. Sources differ in regard to the number of men at Darius' disposal, ranging from 50,000 to ancient estimates of a million, but it is clear that the Persian king's forces greatly outnumbered Alexander's, and this, he decided, would be where his strength lay.

Darius chose a flat, open, treeless plain, thereby avoiding the problem he suffered at Issus, where the narrow battlefield limited the deployment of his large forces. With 200 scythed chariots and 15 war elephants at his command, a flat terrain was paramount, and so he sent his soldiers to flatten the earth. In the dry autumn heat, the field was a vast expanse of empty earth with no hills, trees, or rivers to use as cover.

Alexander had already taken several Persian cavalymen prisoner and learned of Darius' location and tactics. He marched his army to roughly 11 kilometres (seven miles) away from



**ALEXANDER'S STRATEGY**

The battle is thought to have been won by Alexander's military genius and a dangerous manoeuvre that required almost perfect timing in the chaos on the field. Darius was hesitant to fight the Macedonian king after he had defeated him at Issus, but his hand was forced and history repeated itself.

**QUANTITY VS QUALITY**

Although Darius' army boasted massive numbers, Alexander's forces were well trained and equipped. The majority of Darius' forces were lightly armed and poorly armoured, and only the hoplites and Immortals could hope to face up to Alexander's mighty warriors.

**THE MIGHTY WAR ELEPHANT**

The battle marked the first confrontation between Europeans and Persian war elephants. Alexander was so impressed by the powerful beasts that he took the 15 elephants into his own army. From then on Alexander continued to increase the number of war elephants in his force.

the Persians and set up camp for the night. On the eve of the battle, Alexander was urged by his generals to take advantage of the sleeping Persian forces with a surprise attack in the dead of night. Alexander, ever confident, proclaimed that he would not steal his victory and instead commanded his army to rest all night. This was not so for Darius' forces, however, as they were awake, armed, and ready to meet the 'surprise' attack that never came.

With his men well rested, Alexander led his forces toward the Persians on the morning of 1 October. Across the flat plain, the imposing

Persian army could be seen in all their majesty, the gleaming scythed chariots before them, the massive numbers of cavalry reaching back as far as the eye could see, and in the centre, Darius himself, surrounded by the fabled Immortals and 15 mighty war elephants. But Alexander's troops, although fewer in number than the Persians, were elite fighters led by a man who was still unbeaten on the battlefield. Utilising a unique strategy, Alexander's forces were able to create a gap in the enemy line and launch a devastating attack into the weakened Persian centre. When Darius realised what had

happened he broke away from the battle and fled for his life.

Alexander aimed to capture Darius, but this was denied him when Darius was unexpectedly killed by his own commander and cousin, Bessus, who coveted his seat of power. The death marked the end of the Persian Empire and crowned Alexander as the King of Kings. His empire continued to expand until his death eight years later. To this day, Alexander the Great remains the measure by which other military leaders compare themselves, and his success at the battle of Gaugamela is heralded as one of his finest victories.





## Macedonia

**TROOPS** 40,000  
**CAVALRY** 7,000



## ALEXANDER THE GREAT

### LEADER

King of Macedon, Alexander built one of the largest empires ever seen through his military prowess.

**Strength** Supreme commander with unparalleled military genius.

**Weakness** Overconfidence and competitive nature could lead to reckless actions.



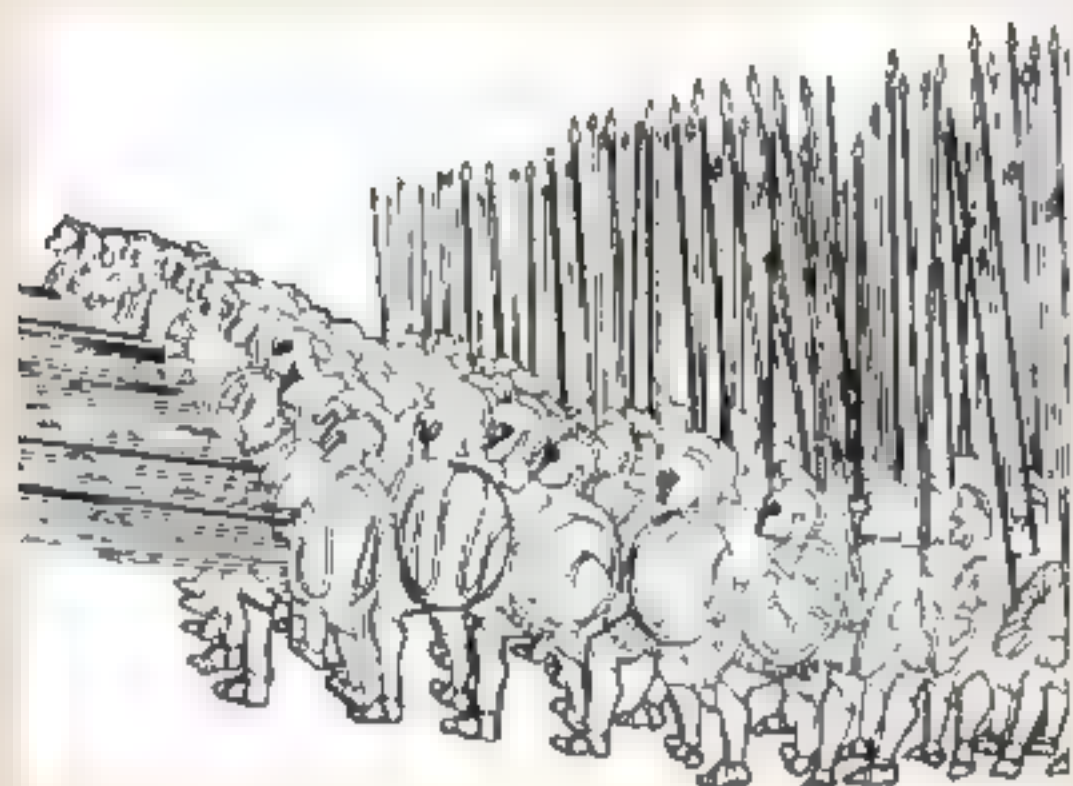
## THESSALIAN CAVALRY

### KEY UNIT

Considered the finest cavalry in all of Greece, they wielded spears and javelins alike.

**Strengths** Efficient at quick manoeuvres while maintaining deadly speed.

**Weakness** A history of rebellion puts their allegiance into doubt.



## SARISSA

### KEY WEAPON

A 7m (23ft)-long wooden pike with a sharp iron head.

**Strengths** A great asset against shorter weapons, creating a wall of pikes for the enemy to overcome.

**Weakness** Became a heavy, useless hindrance outside of the rigid phalanx formation.

## 1 THE RIGHT ADVANCE

Alexander stations himself with his cavalry to the right, with his general, Parmenion, on the left. Alexander begins the battle with the swift and sudden advance of his men. As the right side of his formation marches forward they move to the right. Alexander aims to draw the Persian army toward them and create a gap in their formation; Darius takes the bait and sends his cavalry toward the advancing army.

## 2 THE CHARGE OF CHARIOTS

As Alexander continues his march, Darius sends his scythed chariots and war elephants rushing forward in a bold show of power. The chariots storm toward the Macedonian light infantry but are quickly halted by a rain of javelins. To the few chariots that do make it through, the Macedonians respond by simply creating gaps in their lines, which the chariots pass through harmlessly, only to then be attacked and destroyed by the cavalry.

## 3 PERSIANS FIGHT BACK

Alexander sends 400 riders to counterattack the Persian left wing, but they are overwhelmed by the massive numbers of Darius' forces and are driven back.

## 4 DARIUS TAKES HIS CHANCE

Sensing an opportunity, Darius drives his cavalry forward, and they furiously ride to reach Alexander and put a halt to his advance on the right. However, Alexander sends a larger counterattack against the Persians. A bloody and ferocious battle occurs between Alexander's outnumbered forces and the Persian left. After the deaths of many men on both sides, the Macedonian forces drive the Persians back.

## 5 UNSTOPPABLE WAVE

Witnessing Alexander's rapidly approaching forces, Bessus, Darius' commander on the left, sends the remainder of his cavalry into the fray. Alexander's army crashes into Bessus' cavalry, and after another blood-ridden bout of fierce fighting, Bessus' forces retreat back as well.





**10 A HARD-FOUGHT VICTORY**

As he rushes to Parmenion, Alexander and his forces run headlong into fleeing Persian and Indian cavalry. The Macedonians are forced to hack a path through, but this does not come easily, and Alexander loses at least 60 men. When he finally arrives the Persian forces realise that they have lost and begin to withdraw. However, Alexander is not ready to rest and continues his pursuit of Darius into the night.

**9 ALEXANDER MAKES A CHOICE**

On the left flank, Parmenion's forces are struggling to hold against the Persian cavalry that now surround them. He sends a desperate plea for aid to Alexander, who is hot on the heels of Darius. Alexander faces a choice of either ending the war by cutting down his foe or turning around and saving his army. He chooses the latter and Darius disappears.

**Persia**

**TROOPS** 50-100,000  
**CAVALRY** 13-42,000

**DARIUS III****LEADER**

The king of Persia, Darius III was fiercely independent and thwarted several attempts to poison him.

**Strengths** A massive army that outnumbered the opposition.

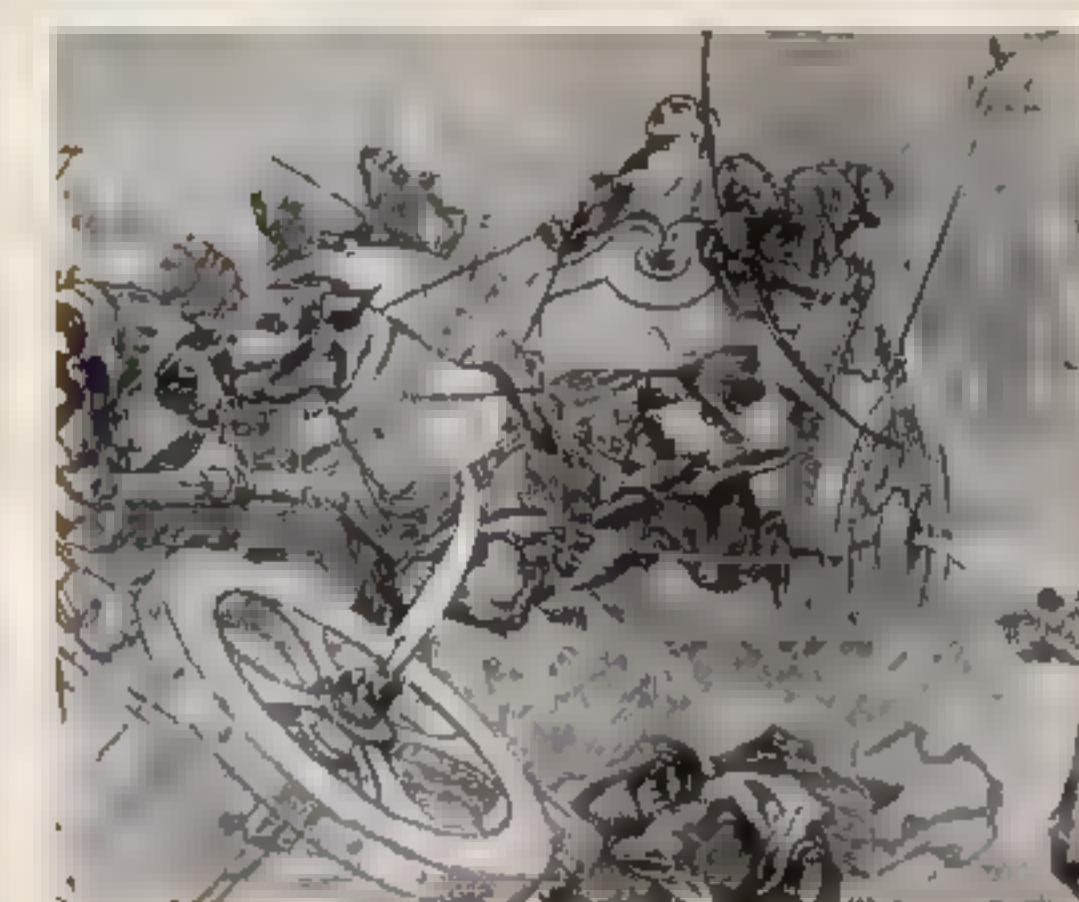
**Weakness** Lack of skills and experience in battle and without any striking talents to inspire his troops.

**WAR ELEPHANTS****KEY UNIT**

Formidable beasts used to charge at the enemy and trample them to death, as well as providing an element of pure fear.

**Strengths** Ability to turn the tide of battle with chaos and terror.

**Weakness** Unreliable and notoriously difficult to control.

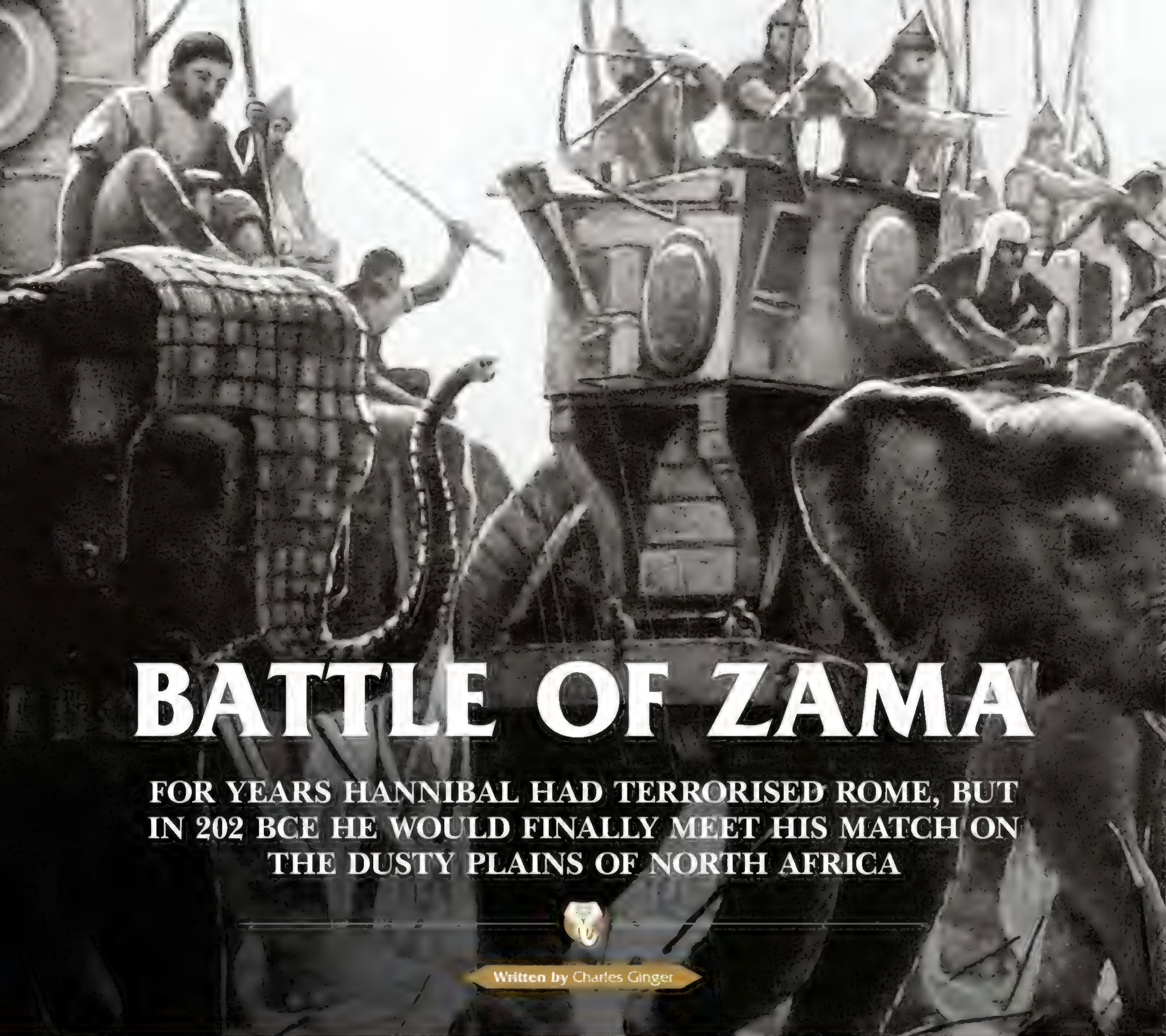
**SCYTHED CHARIOT****KEY WEAPON**

A war chariot with 1m (3.3ft)-long blades mounted on each wheel, pulled by a team of four horses.

**Strengths** Ability to plough through lines of infantry and cut into the Macedonian phalanx formation.

**Weakness** Open, flat land was essential for successful use.





# BATTLE OF ZAMA

**FOR YEARS HANNIBAL HAD TERRORISED ROME, BUT IN 202 BCE HE WOULD FINALLY MEET HIS MATCH ON THE DUSTY PLAINS OF NORTH AFRICA**



Written by Charles Ginger

**B**y the time they faced each other on the sun-scorched sands of Zama the Mediterranean powerhouses of Rome and Carthage had been at war with one another for 62 years (although there were stretches of 'peace'). Yet while tensions in the region had always made a decisive encounter between these two titans inevitable, the timing of this one in 202 BCE was accelerated by flagrant Carthaginian opportunism.

Since audaciously crossing the Alps and descending into northern Italy in 218 BCE, Hannibal's army had terrorised the peninsular relentlessly, inflicting a series of catastrophic defeats upon a dumbstruck Rome that saw Carthage gain the advantage in the early years of the Second Punic War. Yet Rome refused to

surrender in the face of these crushing setbacks, somehow holding its nerve following the almost total evisceration of an entire army at the Battle of Cannae in 216. Critically for the future of this mammoth tussle, one of the few Romans to escape Hannibal's trap at Cannae was a promising young soldier named Publius Cornelius Scipio.

Born into an Etruscan family in 236, Scipio was seemingly destined for a life serving Rome on the battlefield due to his lineage. His father, with whom he shared a name, had served as consul (the highest elected position in the Roman Republic), and in 218 he took his 18-year-old son with him when he marched to confront Hannibal's newly arrived force in northern Italy. In the winter of that year the Romans faced their invaders at the Battle of Ticinus, a clash that saw them soundly beaten

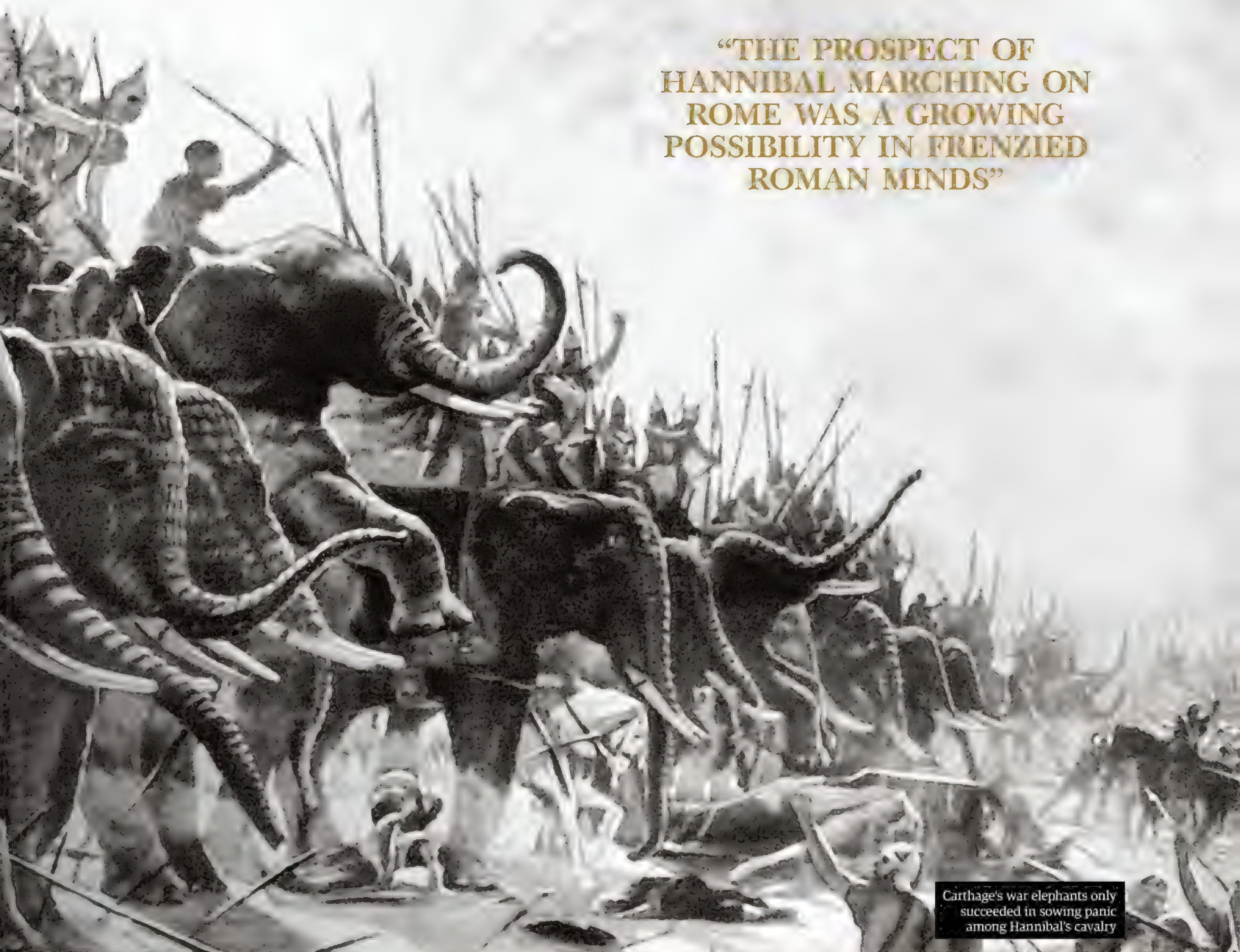
by Hannibal's rapid cavalry and Publius Cornelius saved from certain death by his valiant son riding to his rescue.

Subsequent defeats at Trebbia and Cannae sent panic rippling through Italy, with the prospect of Hannibal marching on Rome a growing possibility in frenzied Roman minds. Scipio's father prudently attempted to sever Hannibal's supply lines in a bid to isolate him, but he was cut down along with his other son, Gnaeus Scipio, while campaigning against Carthaginian interests in Spain in 212.

Still grieving the loss of his father and sibling, Scipio returned to Rome. Yet he would not let his father's defeat or personal suffering stunt his progress. Determined to avenge his fallen relatives, Scipio boldly volunteered to lead a fresh assault on Spain and reclaim the mineral- and labour-rich



**“THE PROSPECT OF  
HANNIBAL MARCHING ON  
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POSSIBILITY IN FRENZIED  
ROMAN MINDS”**



Carthage's war elephants only succeeded in sowing panic among Hannibal's cavalry

territory for Rome. His drive and ambition must have come as some relief to the rest of Rome's commanders, for none of them were willing to raise their hand and lead a campaign widely deemed to be a suicide mission.

Supported by 10,000 foot soldiers and 1,000 horsemen, Scipio, who was by now still only 25, landed his invasion force in northeast Spain in 211. He wasted little time in harassing the Carthaginian rulers of the region, and by 209 he'd fought his way to Carthago Nova (New Carthage) in the south and taken the city, along with its vast wealth. This was followed up with victory in 208 at Baecula and then another triumph at the Battle of Ilipa in spring 206. On both occasions Scipio outfoxed generals far more experienced than him, his rout of Hannibal's brother Mago in 206 effectively

finishing a glittering war that had seen him secure Spain with great speed.

Success on this grand scale would probably have sated the appetite for glory of every other commander in Rome, but as Scipio headed once more for home he was not dreaming of whiling away the rest of his days in luxury. With his customary energy and guile he immediately began to manoeuvre himself into position for election as consul in 205, a prestigious title that he was duly granted at just 31 years of age.

The post of consul afforded Scipio the requisite authority to begin plotting a truly daring military campaign, one that he believed would finally put an end to the seemingly interminable war with Carthage: he would strike at the enemy's heartlands and deliver a fatal blow.

Frustratingly for Scipio, the conservative voices within the Senate (a quibbling majority) were so astounded by the sheer scope of his ambitions that they refused to even entertain the notion of invading Carthage. By withholding Rome's legions the ruling classes hoped to strangle Scipio's plans at birth, but they had seriously underestimated Scipio's reserves of both creativity and resolve. If the Senate wouldn't provide him with an army then he'd raise one himself.

As the highest elected official in Rome, Scipio faced no resistance when he requested the governorship of the island of Sicily. The reason for his request probably wasn't clear to the Senate, which only made it all the more cunning on Scipio's part. Stationed on the island as a (rather unjust) punishment for their defeats at Trebia





## ANCIENT BATTLES

Hoping to avert a bloody engagement, Hannibal appeals to Scipio for peace



and Cannae, veterans of Rome's early struggles with Hannibal had endured military perjury since 216. Crucially for Scipio, these very men were both extremely experienced in the art of fighting Carthage and, even more importantly, desperate to rebuild their reputations by besting Hannibal in battle. Scipio's call for volunteers resulted in a crack force of 7,000 men, more than enough to scare the Senate into finally supporting his dream of invading North Africa.

With Sicily as his base, Scipio set sail across the Mediterranean in 204, making landfall on Carthage's north coast near the city of Utica. Prudently, he sought an alliance with Massinissa, a prince of Numidia, a land known for its excellent cavalry. By 203, the allies were besieging the city, and despite Carthage's efforts to lift the siege with an army comprising their own soldiers and those loyal to Syphax, another Numidian noble, Scipio soon took it.

Carthage's prospects now looked dire, and the situation was to worsen significantly that same year when Scipio and Massinissa once again combined to destroy a Carthaginian host, this time at the Battle of the Great Plains. Thirty thousand men had either been slain or captured, and their general, Hasdrubal Gisco, would later select suicide over being torn apart by an enraged gang of Carthaginians following his conviction for treason.

Where once it was Rome beset by panic as a foreign invader approached, now it was Carthage's turn to collapse into a wild episode of hysteria. Their dreams of forcing a weakened Rome to the

negotiating table had been turned on their heads; now it was they who were scrambling to agree a peace deal. Fortunately for them, Scipio was a man of fair judgement.

Standing by his principles, Scipio informed Carthage that their overseas territories were to be confiscated, its fleet was to be drastically reduced, and it was to pay war reparations. By any standard these terms were incredibly lenient given the destruction that Hannibal had wrought on the Italian Peninsula for over 15 years. Carthage would have been wise to stick to them.

Despite having escaped a string of military defeats relatively unscathed, Carthage, or more specifically, its senate, failed to appreciate its fortune and instead seized the first opportunity to hit back at their vanquishers by seizing a stricken Roman fleet off their coast and stripping them of their supplies in 202. Deeming the peace treaty offered by Rome as an inconvenience, the senate, which was comprised of influential citizens overseen by two *suffetes* (judges), recalled a disgruntled Hannibal from Italy and prepared to make a final stand despite Hannibal's warnings that his army wasn't ready to fight. They could not have dreamed up a better *casus belli* for Rome, which simply couldn't tolerate this galling display of arrogance.

Having remained in North Africa, Scipio once again marched to confront Carthage. His army of approximately 35,000 met Hannibal's force of around 40,000 men on 19 October near what is today the border between Tunisia and Algeria.

However, instead of immediately coming to blows, Hannibal first extended the hand of friendship in a bid to avoid a battle.

Reminding Scipio of the terms that he himself offered Carthage only the year before, Hannibal implored his opposite number to consider peace. Scipio is believed to have listened politely before curtly informing Hannibal that it was Carthage who "seemed to find peace intolerable" and suggesting that he ready himself for battle. Hannibal rode back to his army to do just that.

As Hannibal's three lines arranged themselves behind a buttress of armoured elephants, the Carthaginians among them must have considered the significance of what was about to take place. While victory over Scipio's men would yield fame and fortune in the form of booty, defeat would almost certainly mean their deaths, the razing of their city, and the enslavement of their people. The stakes could not have been higher. The sound of half of Hannibal's elephants suddenly breaking into a charge may well have come as some relief from these horrifying thoughts.

At the other end of the field, Scipio's army could only watch as Hannibal's trumpeting titans raced towards them. Thankfully for them, the elephants quickly became disorientated and began to turn back on themselves, stomping into the cavalry unit that Hannibal had stationed on his left flank. Likely due to their own initiative, as opposed to a direct command, the Numidian riders on Scipio's right flank recognised the opportunity unfolding before them and hurtled forwards.



Scipio's deftly positioned skirmishers made short work of Hannibal's elephants



Events were moving beyond the control of either general, and it wasn't long before the second division of war elephants was pouring forwards. This time the beasts reached enemy lines, only to stride into Scipio's well-laid trap, the gaps in his ranks funnelling the elephants towards the Roman skirmishers at the rear. Many of the poor animals were cut down, and those who did manage to flee did so in terror.

Now came the turn of Scipio's Roman riders. Starting out from the left flank, these lightly armoured horsemen advanced towards the Carthaginian cavalry opposite them. A vicious engagement erupted as each side slashed at each other while trying to steady their steeds. Scipio's men soon gained the advantage and chased their foes from the field, a development that now meant only infantry remained. Both sets duly advanced.

No quarter was given in the carnage that followed the two sides colliding, although both commanders kept their last line of troops in reserve for as long as possible. In fact, some historians have pondered why Hannibal was so uncharacteristically conservative in his approach. It could be argued that the general was merely biding his time, waiting for the best moment to commit his formidable veterans.

Ultimately, it made no matter that Hannibal's army had managed to fight Scipio's to a standstill, for they could never have foreseen the menace approaching their rear. Whether they finished routing Hannibal's cavalry first is not clear, but what is beyond doubt is that Scipio's horsemen returned to the battle precisely when it was poised to go either way. Valiantly struggling to hold the Roman infantry back, Hannibal's foot soldiers were completely exposed as the enemy cavalry slammed into them. The Carthaginians were surrounded and systematically cut down or captured. Hannibal had suffered his first defeat.

Scipio's victory at Zama finally ended the Second Punic War, a struggle that had begun in 218, and this time his terms would not be so kind to Carthage. When Scipio demanded Carthage surrender its elephants, the entirety of its fleet, and pay Rome the truly enormous sum of 10,000 talents (245 tons) of silver, they were in no position to resist. Yet while these terms were humbling, the ultimate insult for the once mighty empire of Carthage was Rome's instruction that Hannibal's homeland was henceforth forbidden from waging war without first being granted permission by the Senate in Rome. A once feared giant was now nothing more than a cowed client state. Scipio returned triumphant to Rome.

For Carthage, the true cost of defeat at Zama would not be paid in full until the spring of 146, when a ruthless Roman army laid siege to the city, slaughtering up to 350,000 people, enslaving a further 50,000, and then destroying every building brick by brick. By that stage their often underappreciated saviour was long dead, Hannibal having chosen suicide by poison over falling into Rome's hands.



Scipio is hailed a hero upon his return to a euphoric Rome





# ANCIENT BATTLES

## Roman Republic

**CAVALRY** 6,100  
**TOTAL TROOPS** 29,000



### SCIPIO AFRICANUS LEADER

An energetic and resourceful commander, Scipio would inflict six major defeats on Carthage in a glittering military career.

**Strengths** Smart and aggressive, Scipio had gained vital experience in the field from his triumphant campaigns in Spain.

**Weakness** Compared to Hannibal, Scipio was still inexperienced.



### CAVALRY KEY UNIT

Scipio's cavalry would deliver the fatal blow at Zama.

**Strengths** Fast, agile, and daring.

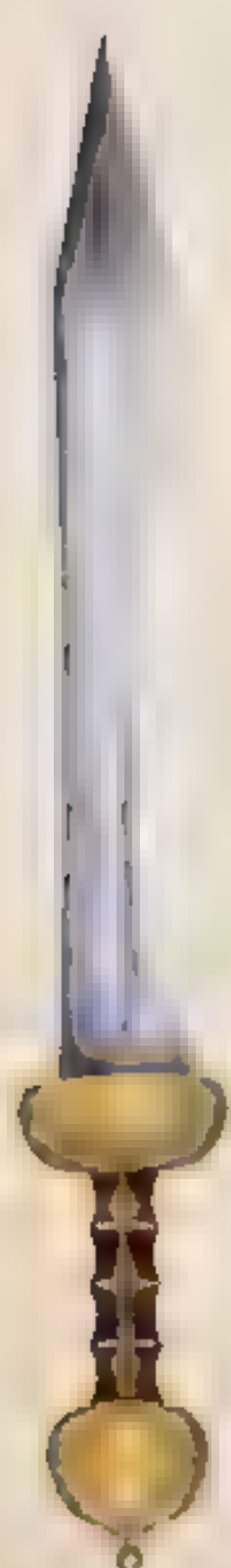
**Weakness** Lured from the field for much of the battle by the thrill of pursuing their beleaguered counterparts.

### GLADIUS KEY WEAPON

A staple among Rome's legionaries, this deadly short sword was made from steel.

**Strengths** An extremely efficient weapon in close-quarters combat, the gladius could be used from behind a shield to make a stab at the enemy.

**Weakness** Little use against Carthage's famed slingers and spear-throwing cavalry.



### 1 ORDER OF BATTLE

Having failed to convince Scipio to agree to peace, Hannibal deploys his 80 elephants in two divisions at the front of his army and positions his Gauls and mercenaries in the first row behind them. His raw recruits form the second line, followed by his highly experienced veterans. In contrast, Scipio neatly aligns his army into three rows split into columns with gaps between them. He positions his light skirmishers within these openings.

### 2 BEASTS OF BATTLE

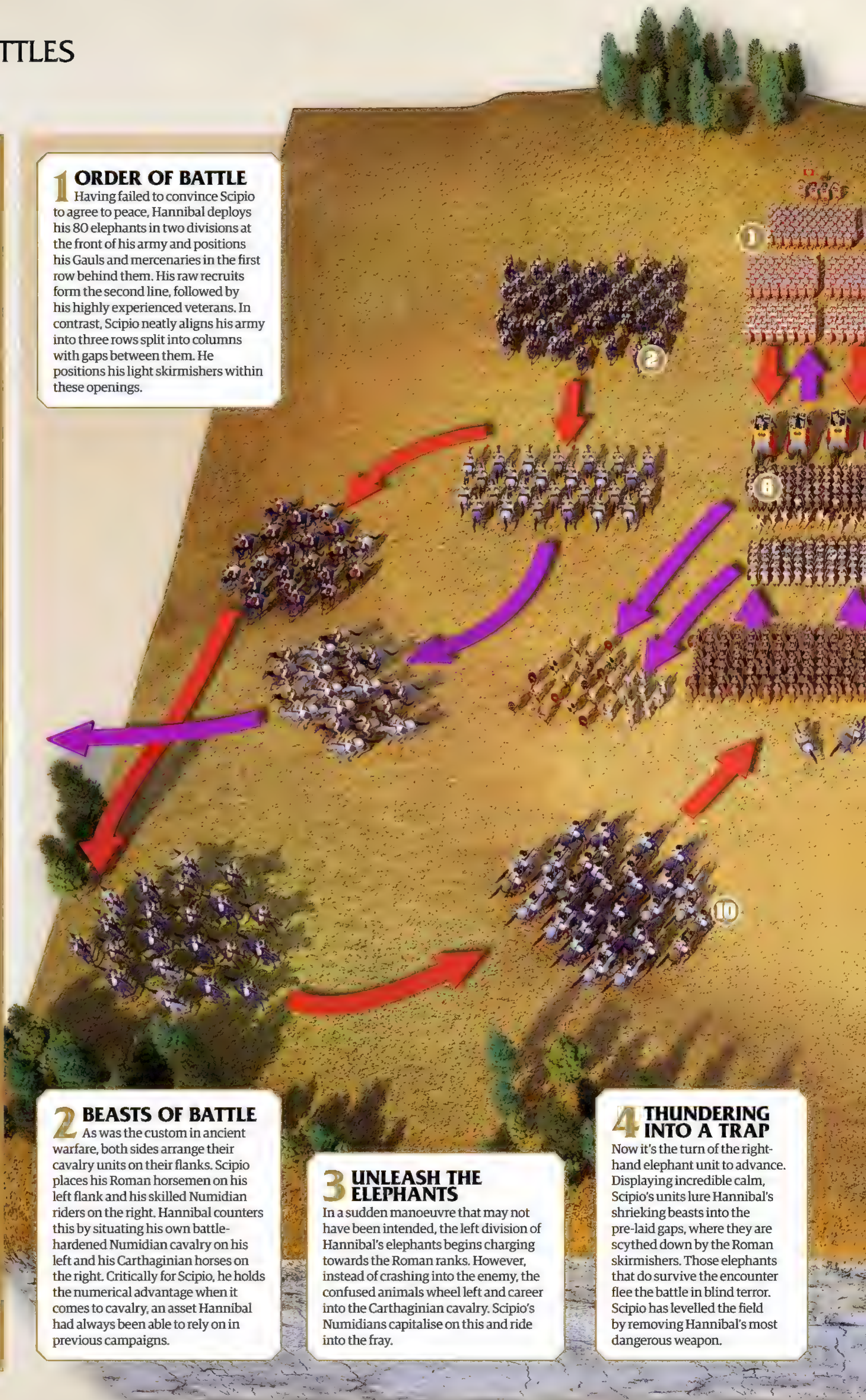
As was the custom in ancient warfare, both sides arrange their cavalry units on their flanks. Scipio places his Roman horsemen on his left flank and his skilled Numidian riders on the right. Hannibal counters this by situating his own battle-hardened Numidian cavalry on his left and his Carthaginian horses on the right. Critically for Scipio, he holds the numerical advantage when it comes to cavalry, an asset Hannibal had always been able to rely on in previous campaigns.

### 3 UNLEASH THE ELEPHANTS

In a sudden manoeuvre that may not have been intended, the left division of Hannibal's elephants begins charging towards the Roman ranks. However, instead of crashing into the enemy, the confused animals wheel left and career into the Carthaginian cavalry. Scipio's Numidians capitalise on this and ride into the fray.

### 4 THUNDERING INTO A TRAP

Now it's the turn of the right-hand elephant unit to advance. Displaying incredible calm, Scipio's units lure Hannibal's shrieking beasts into the pre-laid gaps, where they are scythed down by the Roman skirmishers. Those elephants that do survive the encounter flee the battle in blind terror. Scipio has levelled the field by removing Hannibal's most dangerous weapon.





## Carthaginian Empire

**CAVALRY** 4,000  
**TOTAL TROOPS** 36,000  
**NUMBER OF ELEPHANTS** 80



## HANNIBAL BARCA

### LEADER

An exceptionally brilliant general, Hannibal had waged war on Italy for 16 years prior to Zama.

**Strengths** An ingenious military strategist who was yet to taste a significant defeat.

**Weakness** Commanded a force largely comprised of inexperienced recruits and foreign mercenaries.

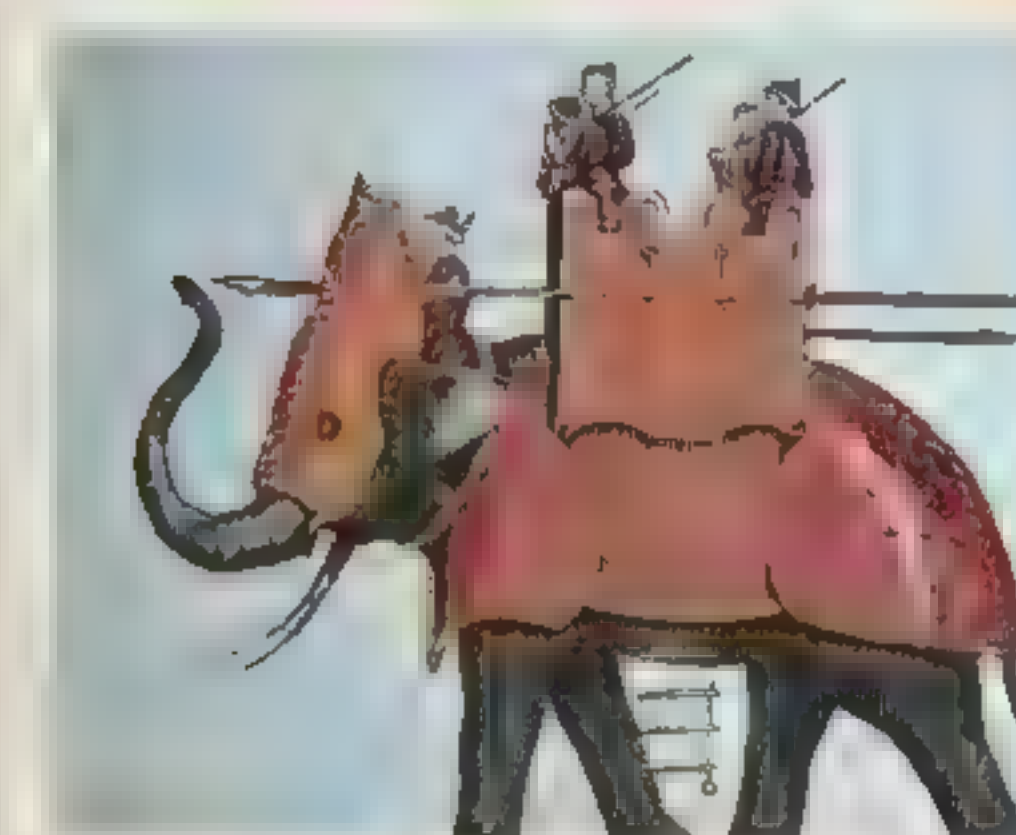
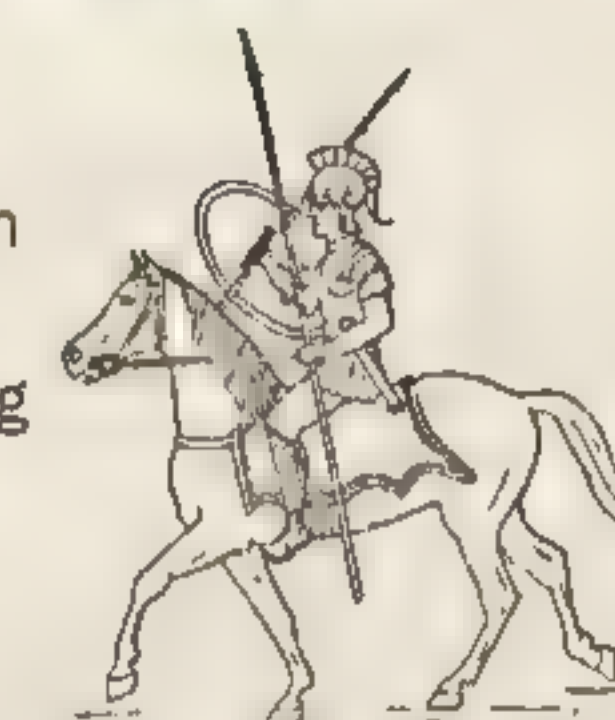
## SACRED BAND

### KEY UNIT

These troops were drilled from a young age in the art of fighting as a phalanx.

**Strengths** The Sacred Band were equipped with a high standard of both armour and weaponry.

**Weakness** Horribly exposed when confronted with Scipio's marauding cavalry.



## WAR ELEPHANTS

### KEY WEAPON

Caught on the plains of Africa, these graceful giants could be transformed into the ancient world's answer to a tank.

**Strengths** The mere sight of a charging elephant clad in armour could strike fear into the heart of even the most experienced veteran.

**Weakness** Unwieldy and violently temperamental, elephants were prone to panic and inflicting losses on their own soldiers.

## 10 THE WAR IS OVER

Having routed Carthage's last standing army, Scipio ransacks Hannibal's camp before returning to Utica. After 16 years of bloodshed the Second Punic War has finally been won.

## 9 THE CAVALRY RETURNS

Just as it seems that Hannibal may once again secure a stunning victory against a Roman army, Scipio's cavalry return from their pursuit of their Carthaginian opponents, slamming into the rear of Hannibal's veterans. To their immense credit, Hannibal's seasoned campaigners do not fold, instead choosing to stand and fight to the bitter end despite now being hopelessly surrounded. Many are cut down where they stand, while those who survive are taken prisoner.

## 7 REINFORCEMENTS ENTER THE FRAY

With his first line in tatters, Scipio sends in his second row of troops to stiffen them. Even so, Hannibal's second line, all fresh recruits from Carthage, manage to halt the Roman advance and hold their positions admirably. Both sides fight themselves to a standstill, and Scipio soon recalls his men to rest and reform their positions. Hannibal's best men have yet to move, giving Scipio enough time to arrange his remaining troops into one solid line.

## 8 THE FINAL PUSH

With his as yet unused third line now forming two solid flanks either side of his weary first and second ranks, Scipio's men prepare to confront Hannibal's reserves, a core of veterans who are regarded as history's most experienced soldiers. The two armies collide once more and are instantly pitted into a merciless struggle. Numerically both sides are now evenly matched - the outcome of the battle now hangs in the balance.

## 5 A CLASH OF CAVALRY

Scipio now unleashes the horsemen on his left flank. They ride hard towards their opposite numbers and chase them from the field after a brief but brutal fight.

## 6 INFANTRY, ADVANCE!

With the elephants and cavalry removed from the field, both sets of infantry begin their slow trudge forward. Scipio's first line plunges into Hannibal's Gallic troops. The initial fighting is ferocious, but soon the Romans start to gain ground, a development that causes Hannibal's mercenaries to quit the battle in fear.





# 10 BATTLES YOU'VE (PROBABLY) NEVER HEARD OF

YOU'VE READ ABOUT SALAMIS AND  
GAUGAMELA, BUT THESE LITTLE-KNOWN  
BATTLES ALSO HAVE A PLACE IN THE  
PANTHEON OF CRUCIAL CLASHES



Written by *Black Gold*

**M**any of history's greatest battles have entered the popular consciousness due to their political ramifications, tales of heroism, or historical significance. Some are immediately evocative, such as the Battle of the Somme, Battle of Waterloo, or Battle of Agincourt, but many others have fallen into relative obscurity despite their huge importance in world history. In this feature, you'll discover some of history's lesser-known but most fascinating battles. From fights that ended with the very outcome they were meant to avoid to conflicts where religion was both the alleged reason for victory and its most notable beneficiary, these ten battles tell different stories about their time, the people and countries involved, and the very human capacity for fighting over almost anything you can think of.



## 10 BATTLES YOU'VE (PROBABLY) NEVER HEARD OF

# BATTLE OF DARA

**YEAR:** 530 CE

**LOCATION:** Dara

(present-day Turkey)

**BELLIGERENTS:** Byzantine Empire vs Sasanian Empire

**I**n 527, in the final year of Emperor Justin I's reign, war broke out between the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) and Sasanian empires, sparked by the Sasanian Emperor Kavad's attempt to impose Zoroastrianism on the Christian population of Iberia. Justin I spearheaded an aggressive campaign against the Sasanians, but after his death in August 527, his successor Justinian entered into peace talks. The Sasanians prevaricated, but in the meantime Justinian began work on a new fortress to protect the Roman frontier in southern Turkey near the fortresses of Dara and Nisibis, the latter of which had been lost to the Persians during the reign of Anastasius I (491-518). The Persians took a dim view of these fortifications, and Kavad sent an army of 30,000 men to defeat the Roman soldiers and destroy the stronghold. General Belisarius was appointed to re-establish Roman dominance in the region, and he stationed 25,000 men near Dara to await renewed negotiations. The Persians instead sent an even larger army, of around 40,000 (albeit many were poorly armed and untrained peasants), which Belisarius met head-on and managed to defeat, putting the Romans back in a much more powerful position to negotiate.



The ancient city of Dara in Mardin, Turkey

Image source: Adobe Stock, Alamy, Getty Images





## BATTLE OF MUYE

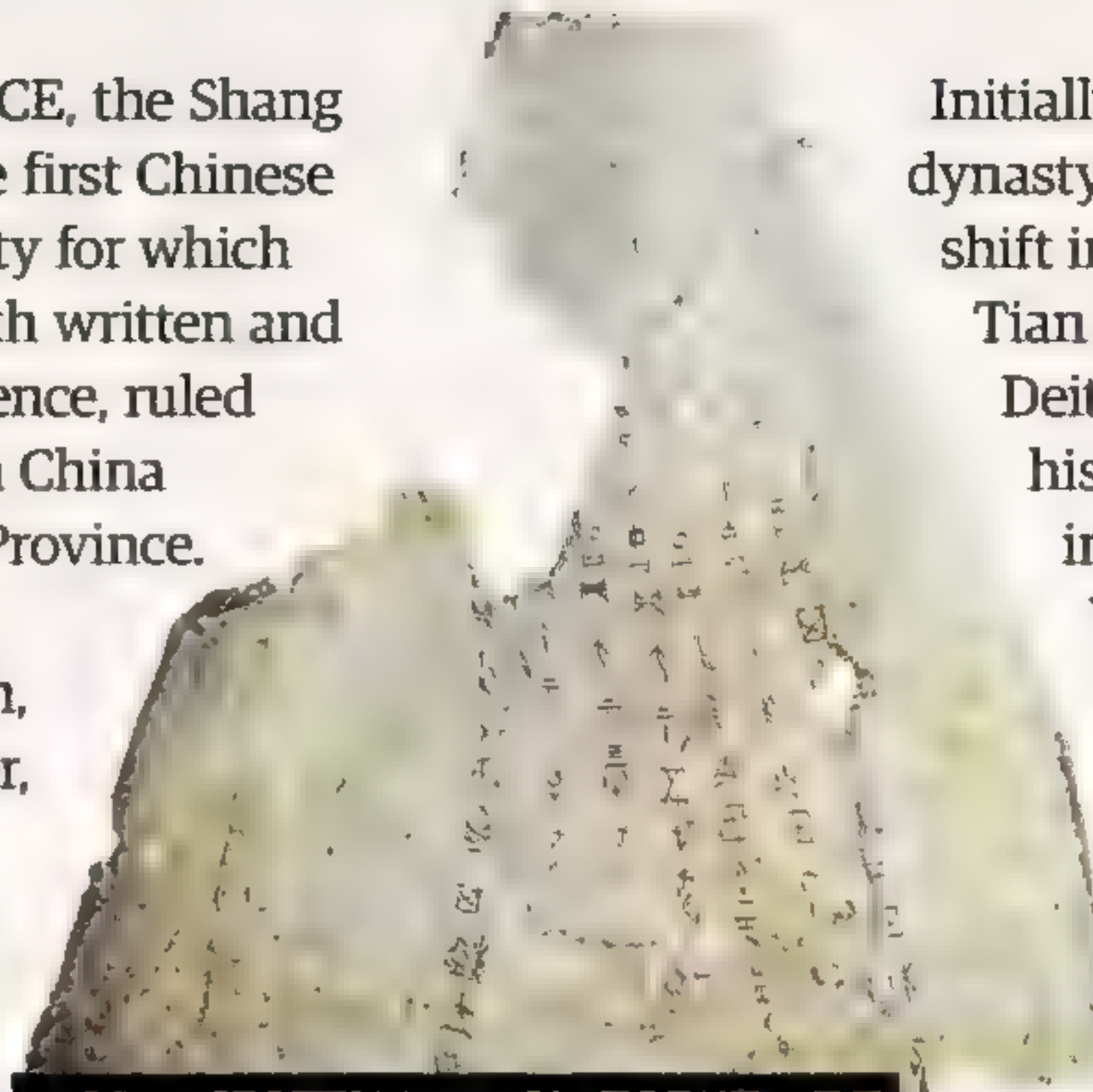
**YEAR:** 1046 BCE **LOCATION:** Muye (present-day Henan, China)

**BELLIGERENTS:** Shang dynasty vs Zhou rebels



King Wu of Zhou founded the Zhou dynasty

Since 1600 BCE, the Shang dynasty, the first Chinese royal dynasty for which we have both written and archaeological evidence, ruled a large part of north China around the Henan Province. In the early 11th century, King Di Xin, the final Shang ruler, came to power. Di Xin (also known as Zhou) became increasingly debauched and hedonistic, allegedly constructing a huge lake filled with wine around which he would have naked concubines, male and female, chase one another. Xin's antics angered his people and those of the Zhou region to the west of the Shang territory.



Oracle bones are our best source of direct evidence for the Shang dynasty

Initially a vassal of the Shang dynasty, King Wen pointed to a shift in the allegiances of the Tian (Heaven, or the Supreme Deity), indicating that it was his responsibility to oust the intolerable Shang rulers. Wen conducted a series of campaigns into Shang territory in the 1050s, building up to a decisive moment. When Wen died, his son, King Wu, took over and soon followed his father's lead by marching directly across the Yellow River into the heart of the Shang capital. Although we know almost nothing about the battle itself, as traditional Chinese literature didn't record such details, the Zhou defeated the Shang army at the battle of Muye and founded the Zhou dynasty, which would rule for the next 800 years.

## BATTLE OF SILARIUS RIVER

**YEAR:** 71 BCE **LOCATION:** Italy

**BELLIGERENTS:** Roman Republic vs Slave army

There's much more to the story of the Battle of the Silarius River than the fact that it was a decisive victory for the Roman Republic. The battle was a turning point in the history of the Roman Republic, and it was a decisive victory for the Roman Republic. The battle was a turning point in the history of the Roman Republic, and it was a decisive victory for the Roman Republic. The battle was a turning point in the history of the Roman Republic, and it was a decisive victory for the Roman Republic.



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A bronze statue of Spartacus, the leader of the slave revolt



An image depicting the death of Spartacus



# 10 BATTLES YOU'VE (PROBABLY) NEVER HEARD OF

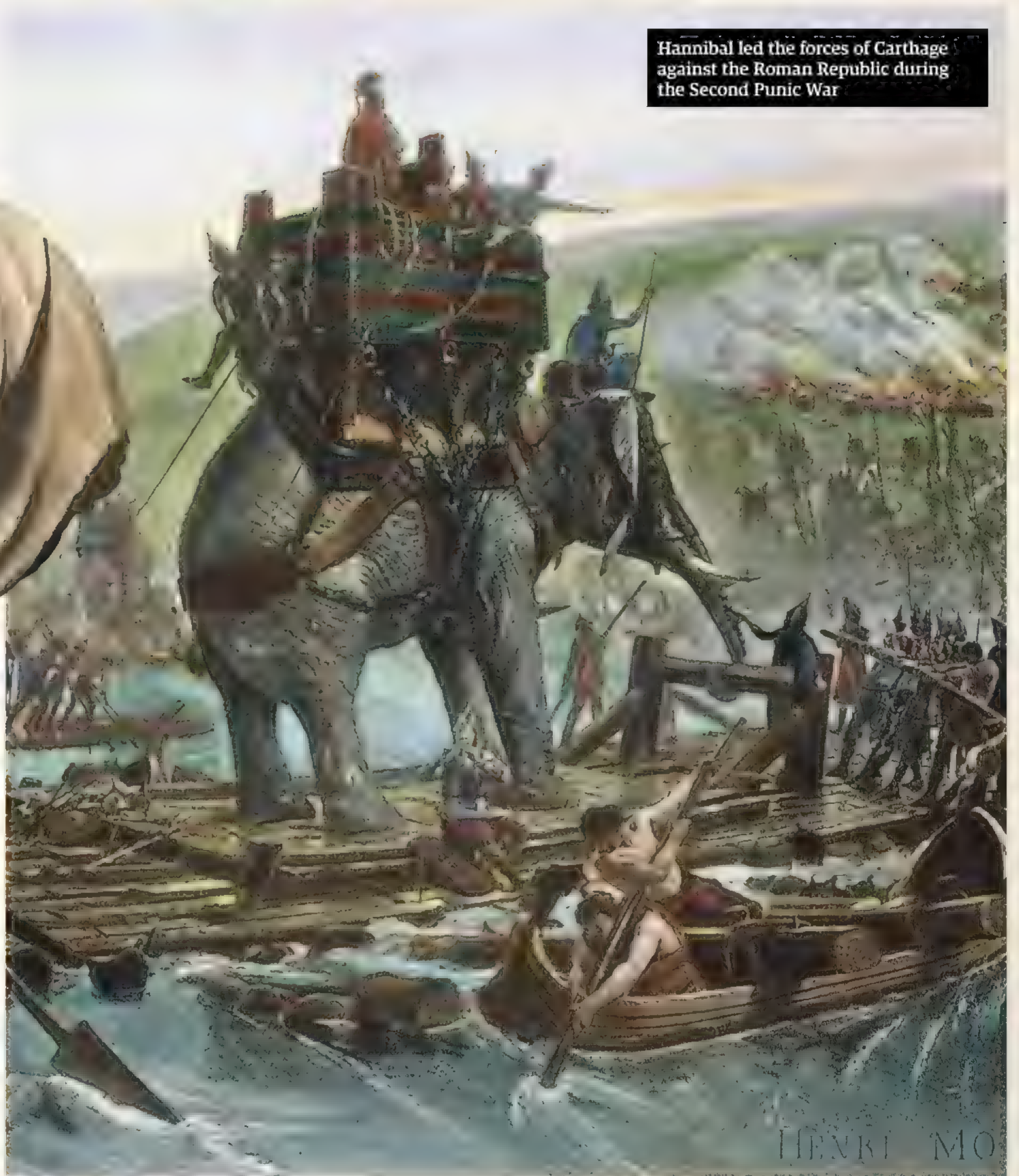
## BATTLE OF ILIPA

**YEAR:** 206 BCE **LOCATION:** Ilipa (present-day Spain)

**BELLIGERENTS:** Roman Republic vs Carthage



This bust, believed to be of Hannibal, is currently housed in the Naples National Archaeological Museum



Hannibal led the forces of Carthage against the Roman Republic during the Second Punic War



**D**uring the Second Punic War, the second instalment of the mammoth conflict between the two major powers of the Mediterranean, Carthage and Rome, the situation in Spain had gone from looking positive for the Romans to teetering on the edge of disaster.

In 216 BCE, two Roman generals had been sent to keep Hasdrubal, Carthaginian leader and brother of Hannibal, out of Spain. These were the brothers Publius and Gnaeus Scipio, and they defeated Hasdrubal at the Ebro River in a huge strategic victory for Rome, preventing Hasdrubal from joining forces with his brother. By 211, however, the tide began to turn. The Scipios were facing attack from the Carthaginians on three fronts and

were relying on the support of local mercenaries. Hasdrubal convinced the mercenaries to desert the Roman armies, and both Scipio brothers were killed. With a new commander needed, the Romans turned to Publius Cornelius Scipio, son of Publius Scipio and nephew of Gnaeus.

The younger Scipio was well-versed in military tactics. He masterminded a plan to defeat the Carthaginians, who had a sizeable numerical advantage, employing tactics used by Hannibal earlier in the war. The Roman victory was a huge turning point and destroyed the momentum that the Carthaginians had built in the region, with the last Carthaginian-controlled city in Iberia, Gades (Cadiz), soon ceding to Roman control.





# BATTLE OF HYRBA

**YEAR:** 552 BCE **LOCATION:** Media (present-day Iran)

**BELLIGERENTS:** Median Kingdom vs Persia

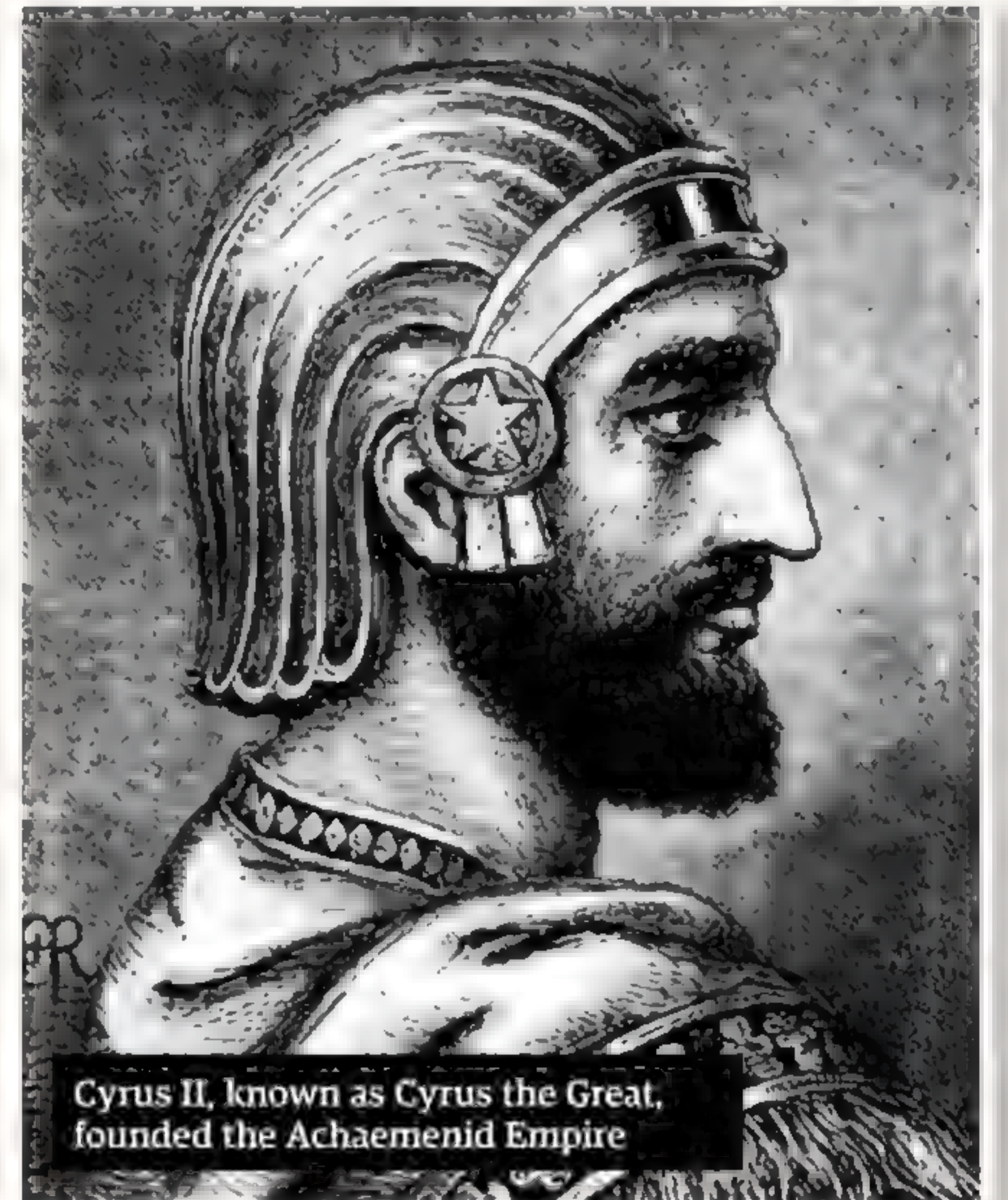


King Astyages submitting to Cyrus after the latter's victory

**T**he Battle of Hyrba was something of a family affair. Astyages, King of the Medes, gave to Cambyses, the king of Persia and Astyages' vassal, his daughter in marriage. From this union was born Cyrus II, somewhere around 590–580 BCE. By 552, Cyrus was still living in Ecbatana, capital of the Median kingdom, under Astyages' watchful eye. As Astyages grew older and his reign harsher, several Median noblemen decided they needed a more competent potential successor than the Median king's young and immature grandsons. Word was sent in secret to Cyrus that he would have ample support for a revolt against his grandfather.

To gain permission to leave Ecbatana (Astyages was paranoid about letting Cyrus venture outside of the city), Cyrus got Astyages drunk and obtained leave. While he was away, Astyages grew paranoid about him and ordered him to be brought back, willingly or unwillingly. When the guards caught up with him, Cyrus agreed to return but suggested setting off the next day due to the late hour, subsequently plying them with food and wine. When they fell into a drunken slumber, Cyrus set off for the Persian

city of Hyrba, where he engaged the population as his makeshift army. They fought off Astyages' pursuing Median cavalry, kick-starting the Persian revolt and Cyrus' eventual rise to power as the king of the Achaemenid Empire.



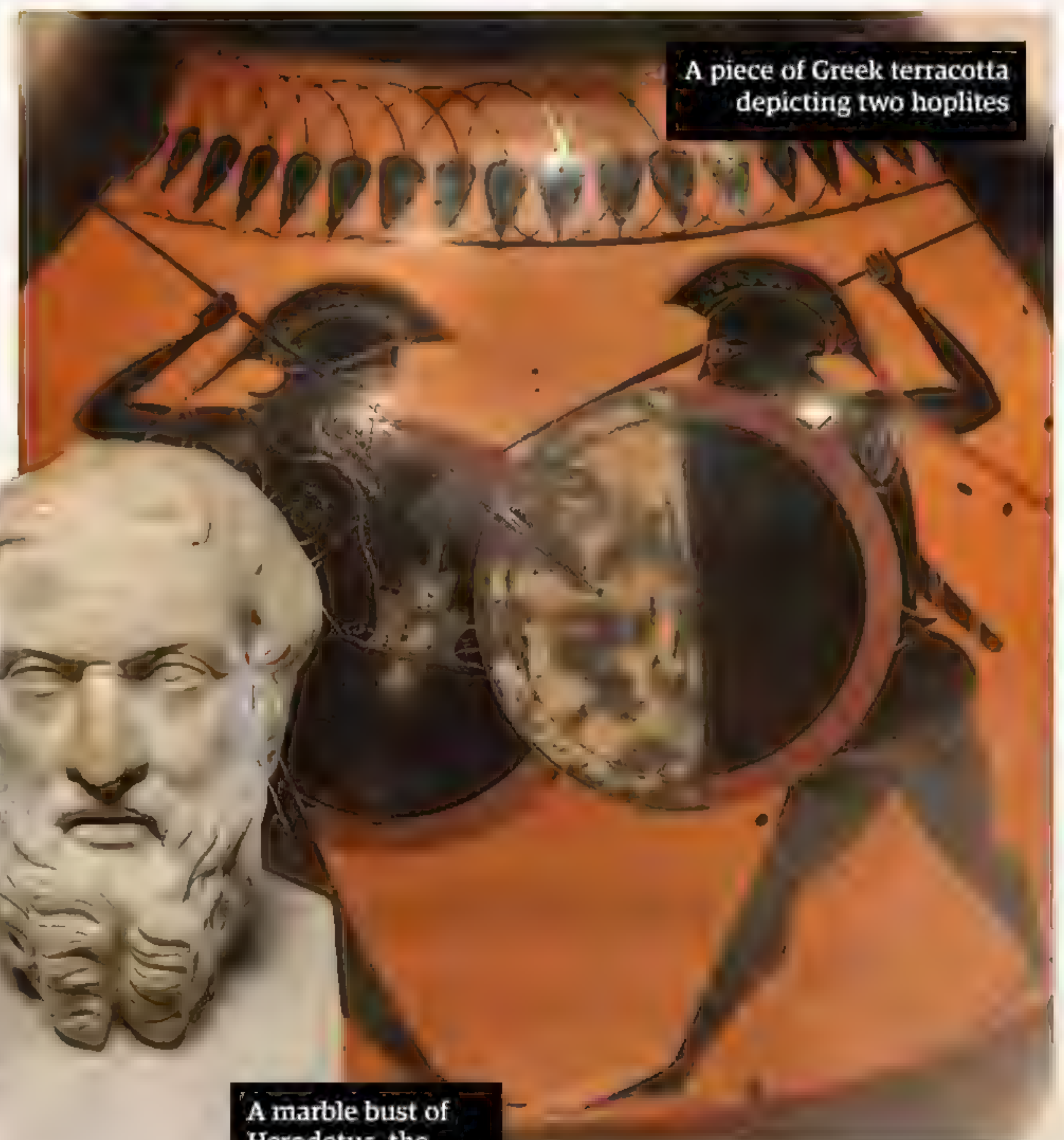
Cyrus II, known as Cyrus the Great, founded the Achaemenid Empire

# BATTLE OF 300 CHAMPIONS

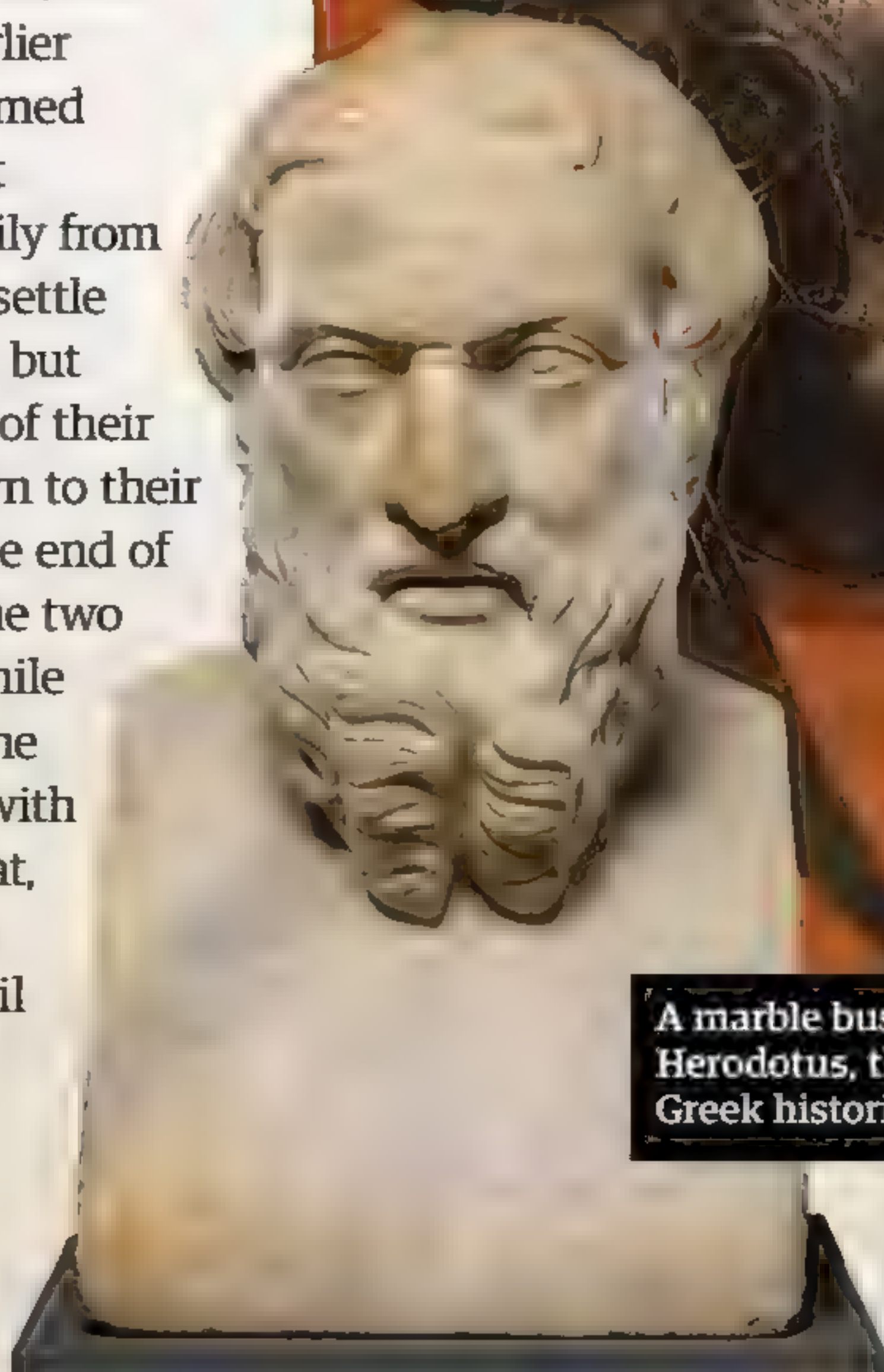
**YEAR:** 546 BCE **LOCATION:** Thyrea, Greece

**BELLIGERENTS:** Sparta vs Argos

**N**ot to be confused with the Battle of Thermopylae of 300 fame, the Battle of the 300 Champions took place around 60 years earlier between the Greek city-states of Sparta and Argos. Both claimed the land of Thyrea, which was located in Argive territory but occupied by the Spartans. Our information on this battle comes primarily from Herodotus, who tells us that the two sides decided that the fair way to settle the disagreement was to fight over it, with the winner getting the land, but instead of having a large and bloody battle, each side would select 300 of their best soldiers, who would fight it out. The rest of the armies had to return to their homes to avoid them being tempted to help out their champions. By the end of the fight, just three soldiers remained: two Argives and one Spartan. The two Argive soldiers, believing themselves victorious, went back to Argos, while the Spartan stayed at the battleground and stripped the Argive dead. The next day, the two armies returned and could not agree on who'd won, with the Argives claiming a two-to-one victory, while the Spartans stated that, as the last two Argives had retreated, Sparta was the victor. In the end, both armies fell to fighting after all, with each losing many soldiers until the Spartans eventually emerged triumphant.



A piece of Greek terracotta depicting two hoplites



A marble bust of Herodotus, the Greek historian



# 10 BATTLES YOU'VE (PROBABLY) NEVER HEARD OF

## BATTLE OF MYLAE

**YEAR:** 260 BCE **LOCATION:** Coast of northern Sicily

**BELLIGERENTS:** Roman Republic vs Carthage

**A**t the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, the Carthaginians were the predominant naval power in the western Mediterranean. It was their seafaring ability that allowed them to establish their presence on islands such as Sicily and Corsica and create colonies. In 264 BCE, when a dispute broke out between the two major settlements in Sicily, Messana and Syracuse, Carthage intervened, sparking the outbreak of the First Punic War, which was fought between Carthage and Rome over control of these two strategic islands. While Rome was a powerful military force on land, its comparatively weak navy was a problem.

Although there was no shortage of resources with which to build their ships, Rome lacked experience and skilled sailors, which Carthage had in abundance. The Carthaginians found Roman warships easy targets and were adept at breaking their oars to leave them vulnerable before ramming them and watching them sink.

The Battle of Mylae in 260 was the turning point in this narrative, when Rome deployed the corvus, a kind of bridge that would connect their ships to the Carthaginians', allowing the soldiers to board the ships and turn a naval battle into an infantry clash. This was where Rome's skill lay, and the innovation changed the course of the war.

A Roman bireme warship fitted with a corvus



XIV

*Grappling Corvus of Paulus*

The Romans were victorious at the Battle of Mylae







# BATTLE OF ARAUSIO

**YEAR:** 105 BCE **LOCATION:** Rhone River, France  
**BELLIGERENTS:** Roman Republic vs Cimbri & Teutons

**I**n the mid-1st century BCE, Rome was struggling. It had enemies west and east, and the Third Punic War against Carthage was still raging. The Cimbri and Teutons, fierce warriors from the north, were a growing threat to the Roman Republic.

In 105 BCE, the Cimbri and Teutons, a Germanic people, had been pushed south by population pressure from the north and were seeking new lands to settle.

The Romans had previously defeated the Cimbri in 113 BCE, but they had not yet adapted to the Cimbri and Teutons. The Roman military was still based on the legion, a unit of citizen-soldiers. The Cimbri and Teutons were more mobile and used a different type of warfare. They were able to defeat the Romans in a series of battles, including the Battle of Arausio in 105 BCE.

At the Battle of Arausio, the Cimbri and Teutons defeated the Roman army. The Roman army was led by Gaius Calpurnius Piso and Quintus Servilius Caelius. The Cimbri and Teutons were led by their commanders, and they were able to defeat the Roman army in a decisive battle. The Cimbri and Teutons were able to kill many Roman soldiers, and they were able to capture many Roman weapons and armor. The Roman army was defeated, and the Cimbri and Teutons were able to move south into Roman territory.

The Cimbri won a devastating victory over the Romans





## 10 BATTLES YOU'VE (PROBABLY) NEVER HEARD OF

### BATTLE OF THE FRIGIDUS RIVER

**YEAR:** 394 CE **LOCATION:** Frigidus River (present-day Slovenia) **BELLIGERENTS:** Byzantine Empire vs Western Roman Empire



A statue of Jupiter, the king of the Roman gods

**I**n the 4th century CE, the Roman Empire was variously ruled as one entity or co-ruled as the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. In 392, two years before the Battle of Frigidus, Emperor Theodosius I ruled the Eastern Roman Empire, with his brother-in-law, the young Valentinian II, ruling the Western Empire, aided by Theodosius' trusted advisor, Arbogast. When Valentinian II died in May 392, Arbogast, unable to get word to Theodosius, treacherously declared Eugenius, a former rhetoric teacher, Augustus (emperor). Theodosius was a devout Christian, while Eugenius was strongly associated with the pagan aristocracy (Arbogast himself was a pagan). Although he was reluctant to use force, Theodosius wanted to make it clear that he did not tolerate any worship of the pagan gods in his Christian empire and outlawed their worship in late 392. Following this, in 393 he raised his son,

Honorius, to Augustus, indicating that he did not recognise Eugenius' claim as legitimate and that he would acknowledge only himself and his sons as emperors. These movements resulted in a clash between Theodosius and Eugenius at the Frigidus River, on the present-day Italian-Slovenian border, in which Theodosius emerged victorious. His triumph, he claimed, proved that his Christian God had vanquished the old Roman gods.



Theodosius I was said to have been a devout Christian

### BATTLE OF EMMAUS

**YEAR:** 165 BCE **LOCATION:** Emmaus (present-day Israel)

**BELLIGERENTS:** Maccabees vs Seleucid Empire

**I**n the 2nd century BCE, the Seleucid Empire was at its height in western Asia. It was ruled by the despotic Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who viewed himself as a god and wanted to be worshipped as such by his subjects. Regardless of his delusions, Antiochus was a powerful leader, and after his defeat of Egypt in 170 BCE, he turned his sights on eradicating Judaism and the Jewish people. According to *1 Maccabees*, from which most of the information about the battle comes, Antiochus demanded that Judea be wiped out. Lysias, his second-in-command, carried out his orders, allegedly marching on the Judeans with 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry. Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Maccabean Revolt, of which the Battle of Emmaus was a part, rallied his much smaller forces, and according to the records, with just 3,000 men the Jews were able, through tactical superiority (and implied aid from God), to defeat the much larger Seleucid army. The battle was one of the Maccabees' greatest victories and helped them to grow in strength on their way to finally achieving independence in 134 BCE.



Judas Maccabeus led the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire





# BATTLE OF CARRHAE

**DETERMINED TO BASK IN THE GLORY OF HIS OWN  
MILITARY TRIUMPH, MARCUS CRASSUS TURNED  
HIS GAZE TOWARDS PARTHIA. HIS THIRST FOR  
ADORATION WOULD RESULT IN CATASTROPHE**



Written by Bernard Bale



## CARRHAE

**T**he words 'Romans' and 'defeated' do not sit well as neighbours in one sentence. However, the might of Rome met its match on more than one occasion, and few of her defeats were more devastating than the one inflicted at Carrhae, when Crassus' legions ran into the guile and determination of the Parthian army.

It should have been a mismatch from the start as 40,000 highly trained, battle-hardened fighting men of Rome descended upon what was thought to be a feisty but less battle-proven Parthian army. As it happened, it was indeed a mismatch, but not the one Crassus expected.

There were still more questions than answers at the end of this bloody battle. How did it all go wrong? Why was Senator Marcus Licinius Crassus so keen to take on the Parthians in the first place? How was this shocking defeat going to shake the very foundations of the Roman Republic? Perhaps a look at Carrhae and why it was important would be helpful at this stage.


Carrhae no longer exists, but the battlefield was thought to be to its east, an area now known as Harran, which nestles on the Turkish side of the border with Iran. It was once known as Mesopotamia and was a much-coveted spot on the trade routes between East and West.

Alexander the Great made sure that he conquered it during his famous empire-inflating campaigns. In 336 BCE, he became the 20-year-old king of the whole region, something that any self-respecting Roman senator would wish to emulate. In 53 BCE, nearly 300 years later, Crassus was unable to resist the temptation of trying to repeat the glory of Alexander's triumph.

He was driven in no small part by a fierce rivalry with Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, known today as Pompey the Great. A seeker of glory and wealth - although he had more than an abundance of both already - Crassus wanted to outstrip Pompey, who could not put a foot wrong in the eyes of the Republic and its people. He had quelled a slave uprising, scattered pirates who had previously attacked Roman shipping and her coastlines, and expanded or held Roman territories in numerous areas, including Syria, which was notably difficult.

Anything Pompey could do, Crassus could do better - or so he thought. Crassus was not seeking an altercation with the Parthians; on the contrary, he clearly did not give them much thought. He simply wanted to pass through the land and conquer as much of the area as possible with the prospect of very rich pickings and a hero's welcome back in Rome. Perhaps he even dared to imagine his triumphant parade. The Parthians, of course, had other ideas.

Rumours of the great march on Parthia were soon widespread. This motivated ambassadors from Parthia to approach Crassus and put it to him that if his proposed campaign was with Rome's blessing there would be no chance of any kind of truce, but if this was his personal campaign



Despite outnumbering the Parthians, Crassus' legions were easily defeated by Surenas and his army





## ANCIENT BATTLES

there could be some room for negotiation. Indeed, because of Pompey's successes in that region, Rome and Parthia had treaties in place, respected by both sides.

Crassus arrogantly dismissed them, as indeed he did King Artavasdes II of Armenia, a recent ally of Rome. The king knew the area well and had suggested the terrain was unsuitable for Crassus' redoubtable cavalry and that he should instead make his thrust through Armenia in order to surprise the Parthians.

Crassus, however, was intent on gaining as much of the limelight as possible and had already made his mind up that the route would be through Mesopotamia, which would afford him a much greater arena of triumph. It had become nothing less than an obsession.

Of course, Crassus had a lot of what we might now call clout and spent months recruiting crack Roman soldiers and ensuring they were fully equipped. This was going to be his moment of triumph, and he was determined to milk every possible bit of glory from the campaign.

Meanwhile, the Parthians were not ignoring the potential threat. The aged King Orodes II was a wily monarch who had sanctioned the murder of his father and then his brother in order to seize the throne, which he had achieved a year before Crassus set out to realise his ambition. Orodes II knew his army was a match for anyone, and all the more so because of its charismatic leader, Surenas. He was a ruthless and fearless warrior who was not only a supreme battle leader but also an exponent of psychological warfare.

The Parthians knew what was coming and began the fight long before the Romans set foot

on their soil. Crassus set off with his seven legions, light infantry of around 4,000 men and 4,000 cavalry, as soon as spring had turned into summer in 53 BCE. It was a force that would have sent many armies fleeing, but not the Parthians.

The initial route was through Mesopotamia via a city on the west bank of the famous Euphrates then called Zeugma but today known as the town of Birecik in Turkey. Along the way they were greeted by Ariamnes, an influential Arab chieftain who wished them well and offered some advice. He was in fact an associate of Pompey, but he did not let that get in the way of helping Crassus. He advised that they should not follow the river as that was what the Parthians would be expecting. He told them of an alternative route that would give them an element of surprise. Crassus listened carefully to his new friend and decided that this was excellent advice. Ariamnes wished him all success and departed, riding straight to his Parthian friends to tell them that Crassus had taken the bait.

Struggling under the searing heat of the Sun, the Romans trudged their new route. When news came through that the Parthians had invaded Armenia there was dismay, because it meant that even if they were seriously needed, there was no chance that Artavasdes would be able to send any troops to support Crassus and his men.

On they went across this open plain until their lead scouts finally saw in the distance a large contingent of what they realised were Parthians. They immediately reported back to Crassus, who was more relieved than daunted, especially since his army appeared to outnumber the Parthians by at least four to one.

Had Crassus been able to see them himself he might have been less confident. What appeared to be a large contingent was actually an enormous one. The scouts had been fooled by the strategy of Surenas, who had ordered his men to cover themselves and their weapons with animal hides. From a distance this would have made them look like a smaller host and perhaps little more than a guarded caravan, especially since there was a row of camels, which appeared to be pack animals but were in fact carrying weaponry.

The Parthians were also very well armoured, with their horses covered in thick leather and metal and their riders also clad in chain mail and armed with long spears. This meant that they could attack from distance and take out two or even three men in one charge, using their lances as skewers.

Sensing victory, the Romans were enticed further into the desert. Surenas waited for the perfect moment and then unleashed a merciless attack. One of the techniques used by the Parthians was to stage a feigned retreat on

A marble bust of Marcus Licinius Crassus



Crassus was determined to outperform his rival Pompey and wanted to emulate Alexander the Great





horseback. Convinced they had the Parthians on the run, excited Roman soldiers raced after them, breaking their lines in their haste. The Parthian cavalry then turned in their saddles to ride backwards and with deadly accuracy picked off their disorganised enemy in a hail of arrows. This worked particularly well when Crassus sent his son Publius in pursuit of some retreating Parthians. He was accompanied by around 2,000 men, including 1,300 cavalry and 500 archers. It is thought that none returned.

The battle lasted for four days and the reports went from bad to worse. Crassus was dismayed to learn that his son had been captured. He was completely crushed when the head of Publius was openly displayed to the Romans as a warning.

Crassus and his army fought on, but it was a lost cause. His men were no match for the Parthians, and man after man, horse after horse fell and added their blood to the pools soaking into the sand. Finally, Crassus himself fell, and his severed head was taken as a trophy and put on show at the banquet of celebration later held in Armenia. Honours were bestowed upon Pomaxathres, the soldier who had killed and beheaded Crassus.

More than 40,000 had followed Crassus, but only a handful returned. It was a foolish endeavour, an ego trip into disaster. Worst of all, it was an embarrassment to Rome.

In the wake of his stunning victory, the legend of Surenas flourished. Hailed as a hero, he was publicly honoured by King Orodes II, who praised his courage. The same paranoid king would order Surenas' execution later that year, so fearful was he of his popularity.



The Parthians were well prepared for the Roman invasion

Tetradrachms with busts of Artavasdes II of Armenia (left) and Orodes II, king of the Parthian Empire



RIGHT: Crassus was killed during the battle by a Parthian soldier called Pomaxathres



A year before the Battle of Carrhae, Crassus had looted the Temple of Jerusalem

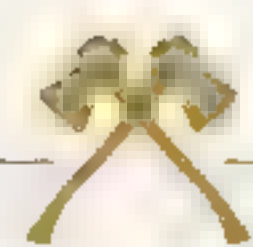






# BATTLE OF RAVENNA

ANNOY YOUR FOREIGN ALLIES AT YOUR PERIL... AS THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE LEARNED TO ITS COST IN 476 CE



Written by *James Milner*

All empires fragment and fall eventually, no matter how great their territory or powerful their military, but the end of the Western Roman Empire continues to fascinate scholars of pre-medieval European history more than 1,500 years after the fact. This is perhaps because it's so relevant to our modern lives: this tale of a fractured Old World contains betrayals, alliances, and conquests that parallel those of recent decades.

As scholars of the period will know, the power of Rome was split into the so-called Tetrarchy - a leadership system of four individuals, two emperors (*augusti*) and their junior successors (*caesares*) - in 293 CE. Under this system, the empire's Western and Eastern provinces were controlled separately, technically in alliance but also remaining prone to disagreements.

As the end of the 5th century CE approached, the writing was on the wall, so to speak, for the Western Empire. Rome had been sacked twice in living memory, once by the Visigoths in 410 CE and again by the Vandals in 455 CE, and the Western Empire was paying barbarian armies from outside its borders, known as *foederati*, to supply assistance when required.

Some of these mercenary armies were also rewarded with status, specifically those in

Gaul, Spain, and Africa, and here lay the seeds of the Western Empire's downfall. Certain Italian-resident *foederati*, among them the Herulians and the Scirians, were envious of their comrades' good fortune and took it upon themselves in 476 CE to demand ownership of Italian land from Orestes, Rome's highly ambitious *magister militum*, or head of the armed forces.

Orestes' decision to refuse these demands proved to be his undoing and also the last straw for the Western Empire itself. Enraged by his perceived injustice, the barbarian troops gathered under a new leader, Flavius Odoacer, a German soldier born in 433 CE. Recruiting an army of soldiers from the length and breadth of Italy, Odoacer marched on Ravenna, the capital of the Western Empire, where he fought and defeated the few

remaining soldiers of the local garrison, led by Orestes' brother Paulus, in early September 476 CE.

Note that this was the second Battle of Ravenna in two years: a conflict had also occurred there in 475 CE between Orestes and the Western Empire's then-emperor, Julius Nepos, after which the latter was deposed and obliged to escape to Dalmatia in present-day Croatia. Although Nepos was replaced as emperor by Orestes' 16-year-old son, Romulus Augustulus, he refused to relinquish his title, thereby considerably hindering the young usurper's efforts by doing so. After losing the second Ravenna battle, Orestes fled to Pavia, although



A coin bearing the image of Odoacer: note his hairstyle and moustache, a look that was considered 'barbaric'



that city was pillaged and he and Paulus were subsequently executed.

Thanks to Nepos, the reign of Romulus was not taken seriously - even Augustulus, meaning 'little Augustus', was an insult - and the youth ruled for only ten months, from 31 October 475 CE until 4 September 476 CE, the point at which he was forced to abdicate. However, the teenage monarch did not endure his father's fate: according to the 1636 chronicle *Anonymus Valesianus*, Romulus' youthful good looks persuaded Odoacer to spare his life, set him up with a generous pension, and transport him to Campania, where he lived with relatives. Records indicate that he may have survived there as long as 511 CE.





An undated engraving with the caption "Romulus Augustulus surrenders to Odoacer the Insignia of Empire"

The key moment for the Western Empire came when Odoacer, declining to name an imperial successor to Romulus, was himself awarded the throne under the title king of Italy, thus calling time on a long line of Western emperors. Wisely, he immediately pledged allegiance to Emperor Zeno Augustus of the Eastern Empire; like Zeno, he acknowledged the continuing status of Julius Nepos, and he bestowed favours on his friends in the Senate, making him a popular leader.

When Nepos was assassinated in Dalmatia in 480, Odoacer invaded that territory in order to punish the culprits and decided to also annex the region for good measure. His reign only ended when Zeno, his supposed ally, grew wary

of his Western counterpart's burgeoning power and arranged for the Ostrogoth king, Theoderic the Great, to wage war against him in 489 CE - Theoderic eventually killed Odoacer four years later and succeeded him as king of Italy.

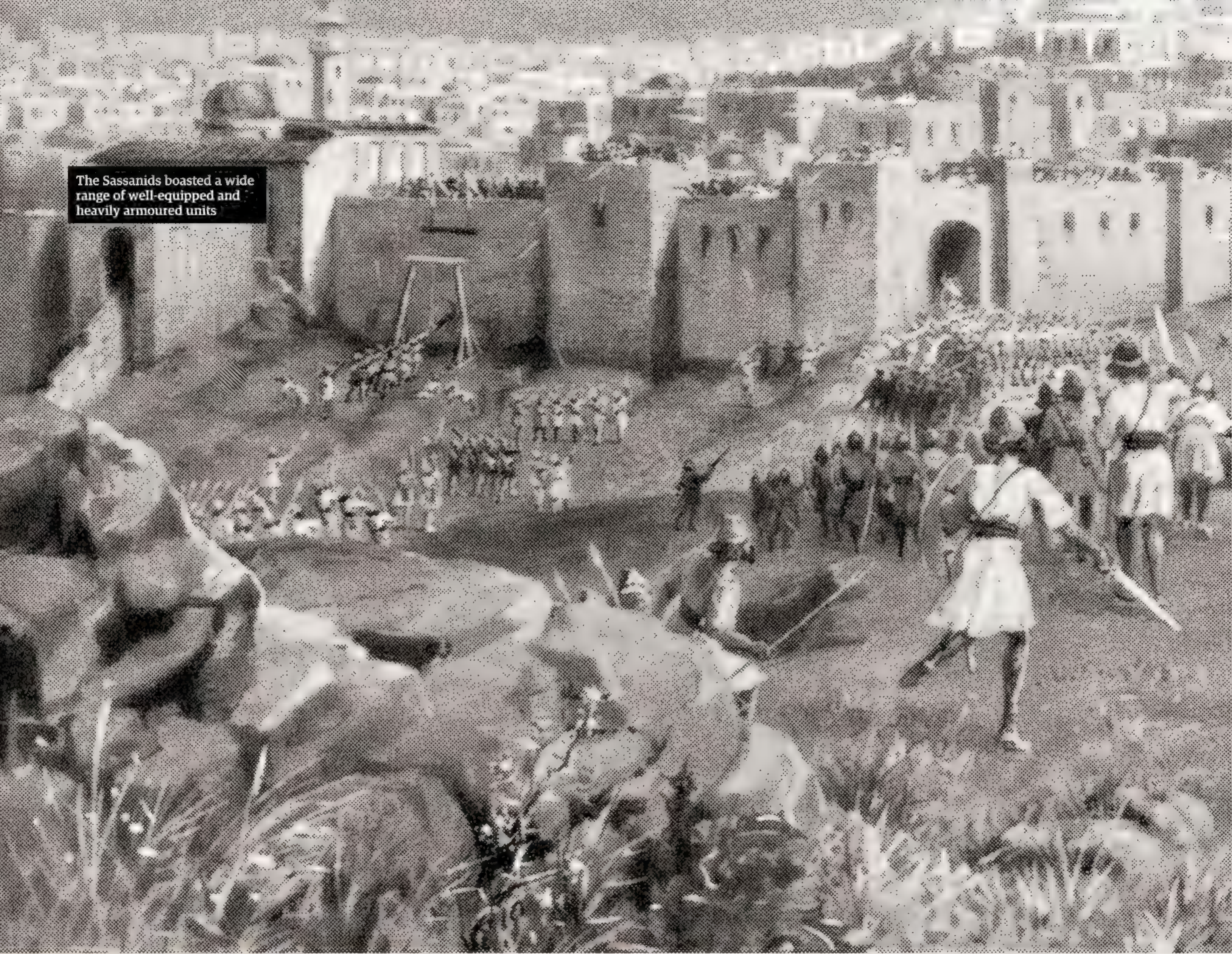
Odoacer's position in history is assured, even if his reign was cut short: his deposition of the last Western emperor of Rome led directly to the advent of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. For better or worse, he and his victory at the Battle of Ravenna in 476 CE left a deep and enduring mark on global history.

Romulus Augustulus resigns the crown  
in a drawing from the *Young Folks'*  
*History of Rome*, 1880



Images source: Getty Images, Wiki - British Museum,





The Sassanids boasted a wide range of well-equipped and heavily armoured units

# BATTLE OF WALAJA

**KEEN TO EXPLOIT THEIR ENEMY'S WEAKNESS, IN 633 A MUSLIM ARMY MARCHED INTO ARABIA. FAILURE WOULD MEAN DISASTER. VICTORY WOULD CHANGE THE WORLD**



Written by Fawzan Al-Sayid

**W**hen Abu Bakr was elected the first caliph of the Muslim community in 632 CE, he inherited a precarious realm. Though Muhammad had united the tribes of Arabia, after his death many refused to recognise the leadership of his nominated successor; withdrawing from treaties, withholding taxes, and some even embracing other prophets.

Abu Bakr wasted no time in putting 'apostate' rebels to the sword, and by the following year all pockets of resistance had been annihilated. This was thanks especially to the efforts of the ingenious general Khālid ibn al-Walid, who crushed the rebellious clans of the central region of Najd. The swift campaign was seen as a divine stamp of approval, formalising the emergent Rashidun, or 'Rightly Guided', caliphate. With Arabia finally at peace, Abu Bakr was anxious to direct the Bedouins' warlike disposition elsewhere. Now his gravest threats lay to the north in the form of the Byzantine and Sassanid empires.

During the previous three decades, the Persian Sassanids and Roman Byzantines had





exhausted one another fighting a gruelling war for supremacy, only for it to end in a stalemate. The Persians had also smashed both the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids, Arab client kingdoms who had previously protected the southern reaches of both empires - the Byzantine Levant and Sassanid Mesopotamia. In the ensuing chaos, an ambitious Bedouin tribal leader began launching raids deep into Mesopotamia, revealing the Sassanids' vulnerabilities. Sensing that the iron was hot, Abu Bakr ordered Khālid to march north and take the city of Al Hirah, the former Lakhmid capital in Mesopotamia.

Though Khālid set out with 2,000 zealous soldiers, by the time he reached the border he had recruited 16,000 volunteers. Passions were running high and many were eager to spread the faith - or die trying. On the way, Khālid penned a letter to Hurmuz, a Persian governor near the border, which began: "Praise be to God, who has scattered your servants, wrested your sovereignty away and rendered your plotting weak." The letter demanded the Persians embrace Islam or bend the knee and pay tribute, otherwise, "I will most

certainly send against you a people who love death just as you love life."

Hurmuz scoffed - even at their weakest, the Sassanids boasted one of the most powerful, best-equipped armies in the world, with units ranging from slingers to war elephants. Their pride and joy, the heavy cavalry, were armed with exceptional bows, lances, and melee weapons, clad in a coat of mail, full-faced aventail, breastplate, and greaves. Even their horses were armoured. Hurmuz himself wore a jewel-studded conical cap - worth 100,000 dirhams - worn only by the most elite of nobles. No, he had no intention of backing away from a ragtag bunch of Bedouin raiders.

After all, despite considerable skill with the Roman-inspired short sword and long spears, pre-Islamic Bedouin armies were little more than armed mobs. Muhammad, however, had changed all that. A visionary military strategist, he learned from his mighty neighbours, replacing his javelins with the Sassanid-inspired Hijaz longbow - previously stigmatised as a coward's weapon. Under his leadership the Arabs perfected a distinct brand of warfare, with armies spearheaded by an

elite cavalry vanguard, followed by an infantry core and two further cavalry wings. Horses were in such short supply, so the Muslims led them to battle on foot and used them only for crucial manoeuvres. They swelled their ranks with camels, aided by the invention of a wood-framed saddle that was secured atop the hump.

Meanwhile, the most important foot soldiers wore an Iraqi bronze teardrop helmet. Their bodies were protected by two mail hauberks with a tunic in between, their swords hanging from a leather strap across the body. Others wore turbans, fighting with spears and shields, protecting archers, who kept the enemy cavalry at bay, allowing the Arabs to use their favoured cavalry tactic of repeatedly attacking then falling back.

Khālid's threatening letter, sent from central Saudi Arabia's Al Yamama, had not only telegraphed his intent but seemingly his route. In April, Hurmuz hurried his men to Al Kazima, where he planned to intercept the invading army and roundly scatter them back to the Arabian desert. However, as the day ticked by, Khālid did not show up. Instead, a breathless scout alerted





## ANCIENT BATTLES

Hurmuz that the Muslims were heading further north. Panicked and enraged, Hurmuz marched his men there in double time. Khālīd waited until they had travelled just far enough, and then turned back again to Al Kazima. By the time the heavily armoured Persians finally arrived in the right place they were exhausted.

Hurmuz linked his men together with chains, superficially as a show of force but tactically to make it harder for the Muslims' agile cavalry to find gaps to break through. However, when Khālīd's spirited cavalry outmanoeuvred and routed the Persians, those chained together were unable to escape and hacked down en masse. Khālīd, a warrior of the finest stock, killed Hurmuz himself in single combat - the fewer survivors he left to reinforce armies elsewhere, the better. The next day, he rounded up the spoils: armour, weapons, luxurious clothes, horses and captives. Four-fifths of the booty was handed to his men. For those not yet overcome by religious zeal, the sight of such riches was incentive enough to follow Khālīd - who Muhammad himself had nicknamed 'Sword of Allah' - into battle.

At the ensuing Battle of the River, before proceedings began, Khālīd's champions killed all three Persian generals in single combat, including two descendants of Ardashir the Great. He immediately seized on the ensuing chaos, frightening away an army twice his size. According to the controversial Sayf ibn Umar, more than 30,000 Persians were killed, alongside those who drowned in the Euphrates.

Despite his ruthlessness in battle, Khālīd proved wise in victory, offering the local populace the option of paying a protection tax in return for religious freedom. This pioneering jizyah tax, which would later be rolled out across the Muslim



**“DEMONSTRATING HIS SUPERIOR BEDOUIN SWORDSMANSHIP, KHĀLID CUT HIM DOWN BEFORE SITTING ON HIS CORPSE AND CALLING FOR HIS LUNCH”**

empire, endeared him to the Christian Arabs, who saw him as a liberator from the tyrannical Persians. He was able to expand the realm, winning hearts and minds while developing a far-reaching intelligence network.

The Muslim invasion could not have come at a worse time. Years of Parthian-Sassanid infighting had culminated in the execution of King Khosrow II by his son, Kavadh II. Having killed off most of his siblings, the latter died of plague, leaving his seven-year-old son Ardashir III on the throne - who was in turn murdered and overthrown. An ensuing interregnum ended with the unsteady rise of Khosrow's last surviving child, Yazdegerd III, who had only evaded death by going into hiding.

When he heard of the devastating defeat at the Battle of the River, Yazdegerd ordered Andarzaghār, governor of the northeastern Khorasan frontier, to repel the invaders. Another army was to follow closely behind via a second route before the two were to combine into one enormous force.

An Iraqi himself, as he passed the capital of Ctesiphon, near modern Baghdad, Andarzaghār was able to levy thousands of Arab allies before crossing the Euphrates. Emboldened, he stopped at Walaja, an even plain spread three kilometres (two miles) between a pair of tall ridges. When Khālīd's scouts reported the Persian arrival, he decamped, leaving behind some troops at Al Hufayr and sending a message to those on the lower reaches of the Tigris to stay on guard. Fighting an offensive battle against a Sassanid army three times his size was a suicidal proposition, but to Khālīd, failure was not an option. The next engagement would be decisive, and if the second Sassanid army arrived before his, Khālīd's campaign would truly be over. Never one to back down from a fight, he made his way to Walaja with haste.







After a decades-long war with the Byzantines, the Sassanid court was in chaos

When the Muslim force arrived, Andarzaghar was surprised by how small it was. The survivors of the previous two battles had recalled with terror the apocalyptic hoards of Muslim cavalry, yet here there were virtually none. Having lured the Arabs onto an open plain, Andarzaghar planned to make light work of this maniacal general and his trumped-up raiders.

As the two armies stared one another down, Khālid scowled, inviting the Persians to prove their honour in single combat. Andarzaghar sneered, calling over a gargantuan brute known simply as Hazar Mard, or 'A Thousand Men'. Demonstrating his superior swordsmanship, Khālid danced around him, cutting him down before supposedly sitting on his corpse and calling for his lunch.

As the real battle commenced, Khālid sent his foot soldiers crashing into a wall of heavy Sassanid infantry, swinging and stabbing wildly. This is exactly where the Persians wanted to fight the Muslims - on foot. Khālid's forces were pushed back, drawing the Persians into a gruelling battle of attrition. Sand and dust filled the air as Andarzaghar sent in the cavalry, his entire army wrapping itself around Khālid's crescent formation. The Arabs endured the ever-tightening push back with patient determination, their legs trembling, men choking and dying beneath the burning sun.

Andarzaghar chuckled to himself. His men were at their limit, but the slippery invader had finally run out of tricks and would soon be utterly broken,

with no desert to retreat into. Little did he know, having secretly scouted the area the night before, Khālid had one last trick up his sleeve. Under the cloak of darkness, he had hidden two cavalry contingents behind the ridge to the rear of the Persian lines. Just as the Arab spine began to snap, Khālid finally gave the signal.

They appeared from nowhere, hooves thundering towards the Persians, bloodcurdling yells of "Allahu Akbar" filling the dusty air. Fully engaged with Khālid's line, all the Sassanids could do was look back as the cavalry smashed into their rear, completing a rarely seen pincer movement, enveloping the Persians on both sides. In just a few moments of chaos, Khālid had sealed the Persian tomb, as Hannibal had done to the Romans at Cannae 800 years earlier. As the Arabs rejoiced, the Persians succumbed to a hell of Khālid's design, trapped in a slow crush of human mass and violence. As his army perished, Andarzaghar squeezed through the gaps and fled, only to die of thirst while wandering the desert.

As Khālid's soldiers rifled through the corpses of the vanquished, he boomed: "Do you not see the wealth of the land of the Persians? Do you not remember the poverty of the land of the Arabs?" He continued: "If the holy war were not enjoined by Allah, we should still come and conquer this rich land and exchange the hunger of our deserts for the abundant eating which is now ours." With that, his men roared and leapt for joy.

The aftershocks of Walaja rocked the Sassanids to their core. The empire that had endured centuries of Roman aggression had not only lost to a smaller army of Arabs successive times but been utterly decimated. Desperate to protect the wealthy defensive stronghold of Al Hirah, they mounted a last-ditch defence at Ullais, just north of Walaja. After once again defeating an army twice his size, Khālid rounded up all stragglers and beheaded them in groups, day and night, fulfilling a vow to make the Khaseef River "run red" with the blood of 70,000 men. He went on to capture Al Hirah, accomplishing his ambitious mission within a staggering four months.

With a Mesopotamian foothold firmly established, Abu Bakr ordered Khālid to invade Byzantine Syria. Khālid dragged 500 men 480 kilometres (300 miles) across barren desert. They survived by gorging 30 camels on water, tying their mouths shut, and cutting them open along the way. Despite being demoted by the next caliph, Umar ibn Al Khattab, at the legendary Battle of Yarmouk, Khālid defeated a Byzantine army many times larger than his, driving the Romans out of the Levant for good.

Building on Khālid's incredible success, within a century the Arabs would wipe out the Sassanids and wrest away Egypt and Syria from the Byzantines, carving out a realm twice the size of the Roman Empire. The ascent of Islam in the east was complete.





# ANCIENT BATTLES

## The Rashidun Caliphate

**TROOPS** 10,000  
**CAVALRY** 5,000



### KHĀLID IBN AL-WALID

#### LEADER

A tactical genius as unstoppable in one-on-one combat as he was in large-scale engagements.

**Strength** A fearless, innovative, and charismatic leader with a perfect record in battle.

**Weakness** Having never known defeat, he was inclined to take great risks.



### LIGHT CAVALRY

#### KEY UNIT

With horses in scant supply, the Arabs also used mounted camels, devastating enemy lines with lance charges.

**Strengths** Speed allowed riders to execute unpredictable tactical manoeuvres

**Weakness** Lightly armoured, with inferior weapons salvaged from previous battles.



### LANCE KEY WEAPON

After frustrating the enemy, lances ranging from 2-5m (7-17ft) were used to punch holes in their lines.

**Strengths** Devastating impact able to rout even the most heavily armoured enemy flanks.

**Weakness** Only effective at speed and ineffective during a melee.

### 1 INVASION

Under orders from Caliph Abu Bakr, Khālid invades Mesopotamia, amassing an army of 18,000 volunteers. At the Battle of the Chains, the Persians chain themselves together to bolster their lines, but Khālid outmanoeuvres them. Further north, at the Battle of the River, he and his champions kill three Persian generals before destroying an army twice their size. He builds a network of spies, who spot two Persian armies headed their way.

### 2 THE RESPONSE

With the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon in chaos, the Persians are desperate to nip the Muslim threat in the bud. They send a pair of armies via separate routes, the first led by Andarzaghar, the governor of Khorasan. Andarzaghar recruits thousands of Iraqi allies before encamping at the plain of Walaja.

### 3 THE NIGHT BEFORE

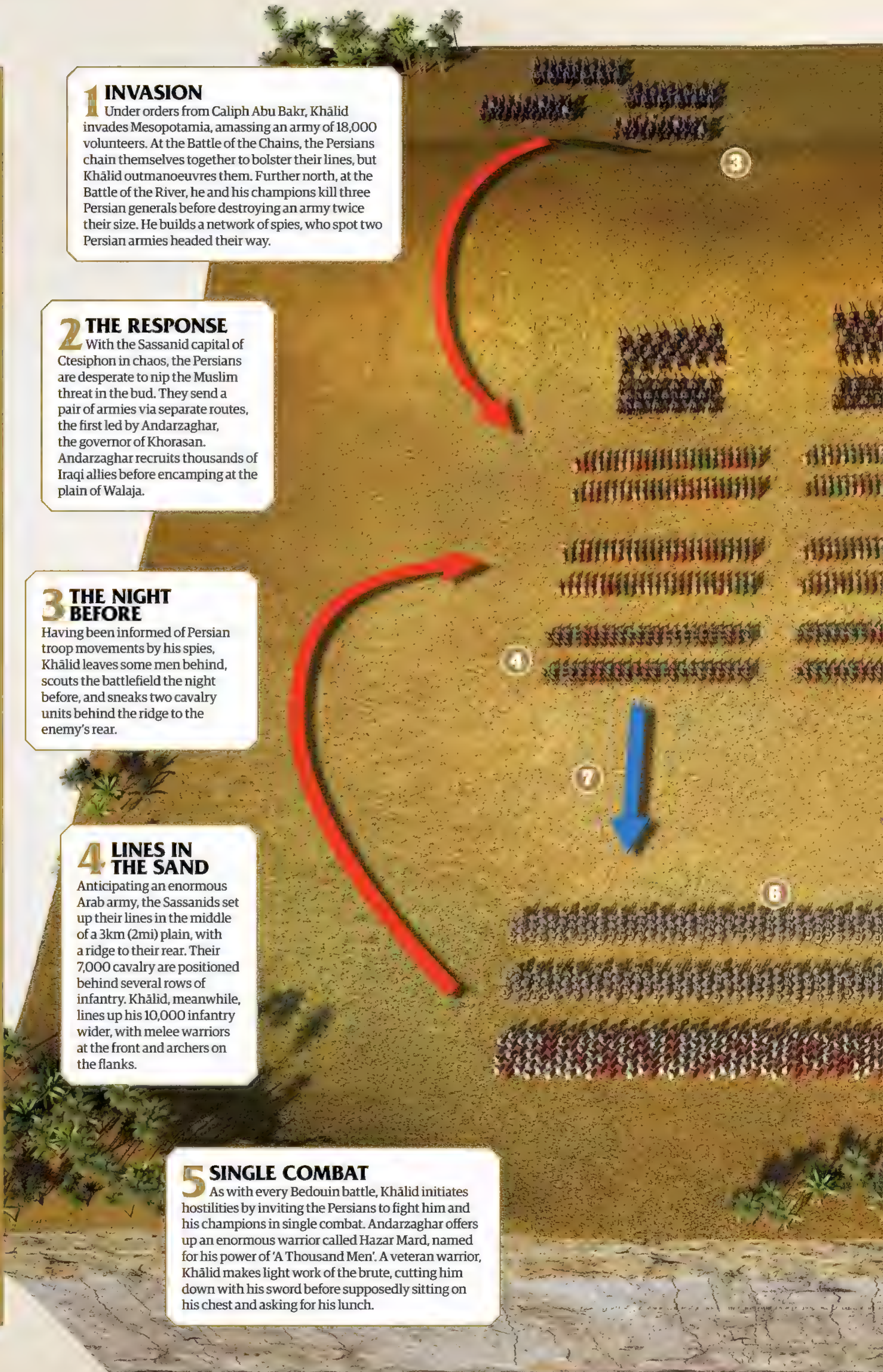
Having been informed of Persian troop movements by his spies, Khālid leaves some men behind, scouts the battlefield the night before, and sneaks two cavalry units behind the ridge to the enemy's rear.

### 4 LINES IN THE SAND

Anticipating an enormous Arab army, the Sassanids set up their lines in the middle of a 3km (2mi) plain, with a ridge to their rear. Their 7,000 cavalry are positioned behind several rows of infantry. Khālid, meanwhile, lines up his 10,000 infantry wider, with melee warriors at the front and archers on the flanks.

### 5 SINGLE COMBAT

As with every Bedouin battle, Khālid initiates hostilities by inviting the Persians to fight him and his champions in single combat. Andarzaghar offers up an enormous warrior called Hazar Mard, named for his power of 'A Thousand Men'. A veteran warrior, Khālid makes light work of the brute, cutting him down with his sword before supposedly sitting on his chest and asking for his lunch.





## The Sassanid Empire

**TROOPS** 18,000  
**CAVALRY** 7,000



### ANDARZAGHAR LEADER

The Iraqi-born governor of Khorasan was eager to prove himself to the Persian court by sending the Muslims back to Arabia.

**Strengths** Outnumbered the Arabs by up to three to one.

**Weakness** He vastly underestimated his enemy's capabilities and intelligence network.



### HEAVY CAVALRY KEY UNIT

Masters of mounted archery, they also carried lances for shock charges and cudgels, axes, and short swords for melees.

**Strengths** Remarkable skill and equipment, with even horses half-armoured.

**Weakness** Heavy armour rendered them slow, sluggish, and vulnerable to light cavalry.



### COMPOSITE BOW KEY WEAPON

The Sassanids considered themselves the inventors of the bow, and they mastered it with deadly accuracy.

**Strengths** Reinforced with wood, bone, and glue, it was powerful enough to pierce thick armour.

**Weakness** Rain would cause glue to weaken, ruining the bow.

### 10 THE HELL OF WALAJA

Khālid's cavalry slams into the Sassanid rear, sealing a pincer, or double-envelope movement. The charge utterly decimates the Persian line, ploughing through their back and crushing them inwards. Surrounded on all sides, they are pushed so tightly together they can barely see, let alone move. Those who are not fortunate enough to be killed quickly by the Muslims are slowly crushed and suffocated beneath the weight of their superior numbers.

### 9 SURPRISE

Suddenly, Khālid gives the signal for his cavalry units to emerge from behind the enemy lines. With the Sassanids fully engaged in the Muslims' crescent line, even the cavalry are unable to do anything but look back in horror at the swarm of horses and camels careering towards them.

### 8 PERSIAN GAINS

With the Arabs pushed to their limits, Andarzaghār launches the final stage of his counter-attack, sending in the cavalry. They hurtle into the mass.

### 7 CHANGING TIDES

Before long, the Persians gain momentum and begin pushing the Muslims back towards the opposite ridge. As his men lose ground, Khālid yells encouragement and has them draw back their centre to form a crescent formation. This drags more Persians deeper in, widening their lines and forcing them to commit to a gruelling battle of attrition. Though the Arabs fight well, the superior Sassanid weapons and armour are taking their toll.

### 6 THE FIRST WAVE

Khālid commences the battle by sending his infantry at the enemy. They slash and stab ferociously yet accurately at the Sassanids with short swords, spears, and shields. The heavy Persian infantry absorbs the assault, responding with cudgels, axes, and short swords. Andarzaghār holds his cavalry back, waiting for his superior equipment and sheer volume of soldiers to turn the tide of battle.





# BATTLE OF FEI RIVER

**HOW THE FUTURE OF ANCIENT CHINA  
WAS SHAPED BY A DOSE OF MILITARY  
CUNNING – AND THE VISIONS OF AN  
OVER-AMBITIOUS LEADER**



Written by David Mitchell

**A**ny study of China's Sixteen Kingdoms period, which lasted from 304 CE to 439 CE, reveals a picture of a region in flux. A chaotic era in history by any standard, this period was punctuated by a series of crisis points – any of which could have led to serious, indeed existential, consequences for the future shape and governance of the country. One of the most significant of these was the Battle of Fei River in 383 CE, a pivotal conflict thought by some historians to be the closest China ever came to being controlled by one of its ethnic groups.

The primary aggressors, the Former Qin dynasty led by the Di people, had accumulated territory and power at an astonishing pace in the years before the battle. As one of the so-called 'Five Barbarians', or Wu Hu peoples, who had founded much of Sixteen Kingdoms-era China, the Di had spent much of the century from 300 CE rebelling against the ruling Western Jin dynasty, whose power had gradually diminished as a result. A series of Qin chieftains enjoyed power in the Guanzhong region, the most recent before the battle being Fu Jiān, who took the city of Chang'an in 351 CE and gave himself the elevated title of heavenly king of Qin.

At this point a key player entered the record: Fu Jiān, the nephew of Fu Jiàn (note the different diacritics). A warrior of tremendous energy and ambition, Jiān overthrew his cousin Fu Sheng in 357 CE and over the next 15 years seized the state of Former Yan, as well as Sichuan and Chongqing. By 381 CE, Jiān ruled the entirety of northern China and, driven by a vision of Di-led rule over the entire country, made plans to invade the south.

To an extent, Jiān's goals appeared to be achievable, especially after 50,000 Qin soldiers successfully defended the city of Xiangyang against a Jin army of twice that size in May 383.

In the wake of this early success, Jiān ordered the conscription of six out of every ten able-bodied men from the regions under his control. Three months later he ordered his brother, Fu Rong, Duke Ai of Yangping, to lead a 300,000-strong advance force south, which Jiān would follow with a vast army of 270,000 cavalry and 600,000 infantry.

The opponents of the incoming Qin forces were quickly informed that war was coming their way, with their main target the city of Shouchun on the Huai River. Emperor Xiaowu of Jin appointed his general Huan Chong to manage the defence of the Middle Yangtze, while the 80,000-strong Beifu army was deployed under Xie Shi and Xie Xuan to hold the Huai River.

Unknown to Fu Jiān, the defending Jin forces had a significant advantage over him, as their Beifu soldiers were elite professionals, while his own infantry was composed of smaller, disparate forces with little loyalty to the Former Qin and – as conscripts – no military background. His cavalry were also largely nomadic people with their own loyalties, meaning that cohesion within the ranks of the Qin was scarce and discipline lax. However, like many over-ambitious leaders from history, Jiān disregarded the warnings he received about the conflict to come, relying on the sheer size of his force and remarking: "My army is so huge that if all the men throw their whips into the Yangtze, its flow will be stopped."

When the two armies finally met at the Fei River, at a site which no longer exists but which is thought to be near modern Lu'an, the Jin generals disguised the relatively small number of their forces by arraying their soldiers in a wide formation. This made the defending army appear much bigger than its actual size, and once the Jin demonstrated their superior fighting abilities, the greater numbers of the Qin invaders became much less of an advantage.



Fu Jiān, leader of the Former Qin dynasty, whose vision of a united China led him to unwise decisions in the Battle of Fei River

When Fu Jiān unwisely issued a retreat command in order to create space for the engagement to take place, many of his soldiers misinterpreted it as a sign of actual defeat, and panic spread among the Qin ranks. The Jin saw this and pressed home their assault: the invaders fell into disarray and the battle became chaotic. Abandoning their supplies, thousands of Qin soldiers attempted to flee the battlefield, with over three-quarters of them losing their lives on that day and in weeks to follow, whether through combat or exposure to the elements.

The battle remains notable for several reasons, not least because it was won by a force much





Some estimates place the Former Qin dynasty's losses at the battle at over 700,000 men

smaller in size than its opponent. Fu Jiān was executed in 385, and the Former Qin dynasty, wracked by civil war, had run its course by 394. The Jin dynasty flourished, recovering most of its territories and establishing a basis for the southern and northern dynasties that followed.

Indeed, South China remained independent until 589, an outcome that would have been quite different had the Battle of Fei River ended otherwise. Arrogance, poor communications, insufficient planning, and military sleight of hand were the factors that ensured its unlikely outcome - and which shaped China for centuries to come.



A modern view of the Huai River, where the Battle of Fei River is thought to have taken place





# BATTLE OF ADRIANOPLE

**BETRAYED BY FALSE PROMISES, A WAVE OF WARLIKE TRIBES TOOK REVENGE UPON A FADING ROMAN EMPIRE**



Written by *James D. ...*

**P**ressure from Hunnic conquests from the east and a civil war among Germanic tribes north of the Danube meant that in the late summer of 376 CE, the Gothic tribe of the Thervingi gathered on the borders of the Roman Empire. Modern estimates suggest that 200,000 men, women, and children assembled on the northern bank of the Danube under their leader, Fritigern, and asked for asylum within the Eastern Roman Empire.

Fritigern had converted to Arian Christianity (the same faith as the Emperor Valens of Rome) and was therefore considered to have a 'special relationship' with the emperor. Nonetheless, fierce debate followed within the imperial court about the wisdom of allowing an entire Germanic tribe to enter Roman territory. After two months of waiting, the Goths were eventually allowed to cross the Danube and settle in the province of Thrace. One of the factors in their favour was that they had agreed to be recruited into the Roman army, thereby solving a manpower shortage. Valens also required that the Goths all convert to Arian Christianity. They did so, and the crossing began.

The Emperor Valens  
in the thick of the  
fighting at Adrianople





Most of our surviving ancient sources view this decision as catastrophic for the Roman Empire, which it was, but all of them wrote with the benefit of hindsight. In 376 CE, there were good reasons to allow such large numbers to cross over and settle in Roman territory. Allowing the Thervingi in can be seen as the moment the fate (and fall) of the Western Roman Empire was sealed, even though it was how those settlers were subsequently treated and what happened as a result that led to a disastrous war for the Romans.

It seems as though far more people crossed the Danube than had been expected by the Romans. The local commander, Lupicinus (the *comes rei militaris*, or military count), did not have the resources to feed the newcomers, nor sufficient troops to control them. Winter was approaching and food was running short; the Thervingi themselves brought little with them (what they had was used up in the two-month wait to cross the Danube). Both Lupicinus and the other Roman commander, Maximus (who held the post of either *dux Moesia* or *dux Scythiae*, duke of Moesia or Scythia), decided to take advantage of the situation

for personal profit and route the Goths. Treated poorly and starving, they quickly lost faith in Roman promises. Meanwhile, seeing the success of the Thervingi, other Gothic tribes also sought permission to cross the Danube into the Roman Empire. The Greuthungi (who lived in what is today Ukraine) weren't allowed the same privilege, but after learning that the local Roman troops were preoccupied with supervising the Thervingi, they decided to make the journey anyway.

Fritigern's Thervingi were marched to Marcianople, some 60 kilometres (37 miles) south of the Danube and close to the eastern shore of the Black Sea. There, Lupicinus banned them from accessing the city's stores of food. This was the final straw, and the Thervingi clashed with Roman troops. Fritigern's guards were slaughtered, but he escaped and did nothing to quell the warlike temper of his men. Lupicinus summoned troops to him, but these were defeated by the numbers and fury of the Goths.

The rebellion spread, and the Goths - still in Thrace - had no Roman troops to oppose them. Emperor Valens was still focused on a Persian

campaign and had based himself in Antioch. The Greuthungi now unified with the Thervingi, and other Gothic units already in the Roman army joined the revolt. Gothic slaves abandoned their masters and joined too. The combined Goth forces moved on Constantinople, ravaging the 250 kilometres (155 miles) from Marcianople to the capital for food. The city was put under siege, but the Goths lacked the means to maintain it and soon abandoned the endeavour. Messages were sent to Valens that a major campaign would be needed to deal with the Gothic threat. Valens sent word to his nephew and Western Roman Emperor, Gratian, for help. Despite fears that a denuded West would tempt barbarians to cross the Rhine, Gratian sent his commanders, Richomeres and Frigeridus.

The Goths split into various groups, although the largest remained under the command of Fritigern. Valens' commanders, Profuturus and Traianus, were sent from the east in the summer of 377 CE, and their troops were able to force the Goths to retire to the Haemus Mountains. Another group (either separated or newly crossed) was in the north, however, near the town of Salices.







Fritigern appears to have thoroughly outwitted Valens, his Roman counterpart



army. Fritigern's forces had shown, however, that combined and equipped they had little to fear from the Romans they had seen up to that point. The Goths had taken better equipment from the Romans they had defeated. It seems more likely that Fritigern was luring Valens into a trap. One of Ammianus' criticisms of Valens was that he was a procrastinator, and Fritigern had dealt with the emperor (in person) before, so he knew who he was up against. The envoys were dismissed, and the Roman army prepared to march.

Valens' commanders debated whether to attack or wait for the arrival of Gratian. The Romans must have been confident of victory to attack alone and may have been misled regarding the Goths' strength. Valens' skirmishers advised him that the Goths numbered only 10,000 warriors, but as the battle played out many more previously concealed Goths emerged. On the morning of 9 August, the day had dawned hot, and Valens' army marched "with extreme haste" from Adrianople towards the Goths, reaching the wagon circle at the eighth

Profuturus and Traianus took the opportunity to confront this group separately, confident of eliminating them. They were also joined by the troops from the west under Frigeridus and Richomeres. Nonetheless, the Romans were outnumbered by the Goths, but by forming into a testudo (tortoise) shield formation, the Romans withheld the Gothic attacks. Some sources declare that the battle was a Roman defeat, others a draw.

In early 378 CE, the Goths broke out of the Haemus mountains where they had been penned up. Other tribes crossed the Danube and joined them, notably a group of Huns and Alans. Several skirmishes followed, some involving sections of different tribes. Valens, finally turned aside from his eastern campaign, marched his army west to face the Gothic threat. Gratian also led an army from the west. In high summer Valens marched from Constantinople towards the Goths, positioned somewhere near the town of Adrianople.

At this point an envoy arrived from Fritigern, a presbyter and some humble folk, possibly monks, requesting Thrace as a new land for Goth settlement and promising peace. Various negotiations followed, which are usually looked on as Fritigern playing for time to allow him to summon all his troops to him. Time was not on Fritigern's side, however, and he must have known that Gratian was on his way with another army to reinforce Valens. It seems far more likely that Fritigern had another plan, and that his actions in sending multiple envoys were deliberate; the time he needed was a matter of hours rather than days. We are even told that Fritigern was full of trickery and pretence, "all too skilled in craft and various forms of deception" (according to the historian Ammianus Marcellinus, our best source), and with his envoy he sent a private letter asking that Valens bring his army close to the Goths, ready for war, "to entice them to adopt conditions favourable to the Roman state" through fear of the Roman



Valens' decision to allow the Goths to cross the Danube proved to be costly



hour, or two in the afternoon. The fatigue of the march, and the fact the Romans were strung out on their line of march, would have a part to play in the coming battle. The Gothic position was clearly deliberately chosen and carefully drawn up; Ammianus tells us that the wagons were arranged in a perfect circle, "turned by the lathe". The Romans moved into position on the right while the centre waited and the left was still deploying.

We are given more details of the Roman disposition than for any other battle of the period, although Ammianus warns his readers not to expect exact detail, and all our accounts are far from satisfactory. The Romans had cavalry on the right wing drawn up, with the infantry some way behind them. The cavalry on the left wing, however, were still on the road.

At this point in his narrative, Ammianus mentions that Fritigern's cavalry under Alatheus and Saphrax was far away and, because of that, Fritigern sent more envoys. Most modern reconstructions of the battle state that the Gothic

cavalry were away foraging, but this cannot have been the case. The cavalry would soon make a decisive massed charge into the Roman flank, and it is therefore highly unlikely they were away foraging. It is far more likely that Fritigern was playing for time until he could be certain that his cavalry were in position. They would charge in one body, not piecemeal as they returned from a foraging expedition, and this implies that the Gothic position was deliberately chosen. What's more, the terrain on the left of the Gothic position, a steep valley, would let the cavalry assemble unseen by the Romans.

Fritigern's first envoys were men of low rank, and Fritigern knew they would be rejected by the Romans. Ammianus talks of this "pretended truce" to allow the cavalry to return. He adds that this wait also exposed the Romans to more summer heat, and that the Goths had lit fires to make things worse. These fires are intriguing and are accepted by all reconstructions, even though the smoke from the fires would affect the Goths just as much as it would the Romans. These fires may have served another purpose, however; to signal the cavalry, to hide the cavalry's assembly, or perhaps they were lit by the cavalry themselves to hide their deployment and signal to Fritigern that they were in position.

Another low-ranking envoy was sent to the Romans to ask for hostages. This too seems to be Fritigern playing for yet more time. The request for hostages caused great debate at the tent of the emperor, but eventually Richomeres volunteered to go as a hostage. Before he could arrive at the enemy's laager, however, two units of cavalry of the Roman right flank, the *Scutarii* and *Sagitarii*, had engaged in skirmishing with the Goths, and this then escalated into the battle proper. It would seem that this skirmish was deliberately provoked by the Goths once the fires had been seen and Fritigern knew that the Gothic cavalry were in position. The reason for thinking this is that once engaged, the Gothic cavalry charged from their unseen assembly point and crushed the Roman right flank. Ammianus' description makes it clear that these troops were not returning from foraging: "like a thunderbolt" they charged and threw into confusion the entire Roman flank.

This is not the arrival of groups of cavalry that had been away foraging but part of a deliberate plan to deliver a massed cavalry charge into the enemy's flank. As such, Fritigern's delaying tactics, as well as his obviously careful selection and preparation of the Gothic position, were deliberate. We are told on several occasions how tricky and cunning Fritigern was, and yet no interpretation of the Battle of Adrianople has suspected him of such cunning. Most accounts are very straightforward. Fritigern's plan was helped immensely by Valens' eagerness for battle and several other mistakes, such as not sending out proper scouts or ensuring accurate reconnaissance.

The remaining Roman troops now surged towards the Gothic wagon laager despite the fact

that the cavalry of the Roman left wing were still on the road and had not deployed. The troops of the Roman left wing actually reached the wagon laager, pushing the Goths back, but they had no support on their flank from any cavalry. It seems that the cavalry of the Roman left saw the way the battle was unfolding and made no effort to engage, instead abandoning the field. The remainder of the Roman troops were therefore crowded together as they advanced. Ammianus describes the scene:

"So pressed upon by the superior numbers of the enemy, that they were overwhelmed and beaten down ... different companies became so huddled together that a soldier could hardly draw his sword, or withdraw his hand once he had stretched it out."

More Gothic infantry then made a charge from their wagons (again something that had been deliberately planned by Fritigern, rather than some spontaneous movement), which broke the Romans. This charge suggests that Fritigern had more troops hidden within his laager who swarmed over the engaged Romans.

On the right the Roman cavalry fled, defeated. The historian Zosimus calls the battle an easy victory for the Goths (since the Romans were in disarray and overconfident) and a massacre. The Romans broke and fled to be pursued by Gothic troops. Several units did stand firm; realising the battle was lost but refusing to surrender, they decided to fight to the end. Ammianus names two of these legionary units: the *Lancearii* and the *Mattarii*. It was to these that Valens, who had been deserted by his guards unit, fled. The remaining units were cut down. Few escaped, and only a moonless night brought an end to the killing.

In the aftermath, according to Ammianus and Libanius, Valens died from an arrow wound. His body was never found. Another version of his demise is that he took refuge in a unwallled village or a peasant's cottage, which was then burned by the Goths. The level of the disaster of Adrianople is difficult to assess - certainly the Roman army of the East had been destroyed and the emperor killed. Some estimates say that as many as two-thirds of the Roman army were killed, others one-third. Several important Roman commanders fell, as well as 35 tribunes. Contemporaries regarded it as the greatest disaster ever to befall them, others the worst defeat since Cannae against Hannibal in 216 BCE. Ammianus is more balanced (although the end of the Western Roman Empire was only two generations away).

The repercussions of Adrianople have been much debated, especially since it was a defeat for the Eastern Roman army, and yet it was the Western Empire that would fall. The Eastern Empire would persist for a thousand years more. The very barbarians who visited the disaster of Adrianople upon the empire were now enlisted to help the new emperor, Theodosius I, defend it. Fritigern disappears from history, although his successor, Alaric, would sack Rome itself in 410 CE. Nonetheless, Adrianople marks a watershed moment in the history of the Roman world.



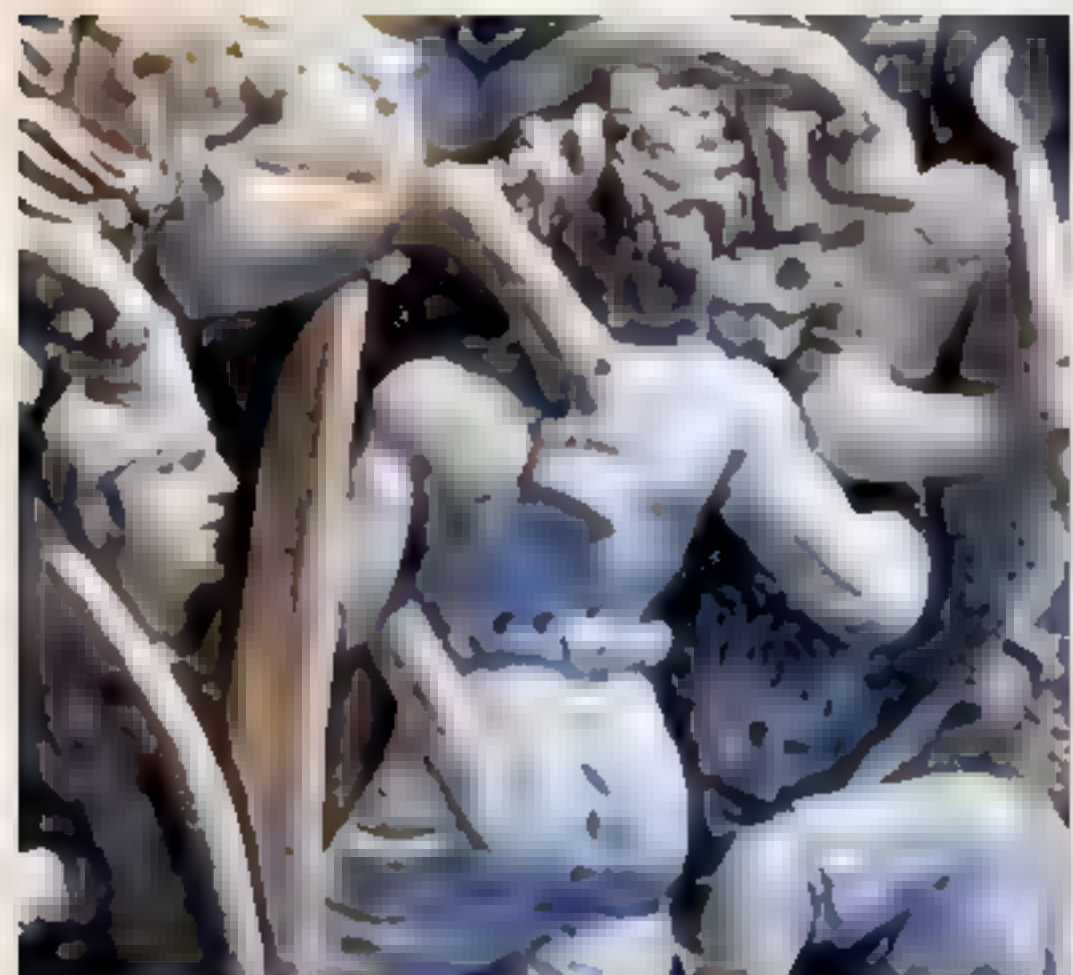




# ANCIENT BATTLES

## Goths

**INFANTRY** 10,000–20,000  
**CAVALRY** AT LEAST 5,000



### FRITIGERN

#### LEADER

Fritigern emerges as the leader of a faction of Goths demanding to be settled within the Roman Empire in 376.

**Strength** Cunning and wily, he was a tactical and strategic genius.

**Weakness** The confederation of Gothic tribes was volatile and demanded success and booty.



### ALAN CAVALRY

#### KEY UNIT

Fritigern's cavalry struck like lightning and destroyed the Roman flank, proving their fearsome ability.

**Strengths** Well armoured, great stamina and endurance.

**Weakness** Prone to leadership squabbles and division.



### KONTOS

#### KEY WEAPON

The kontos was a long two-handed spear used by cavalry, especially those of Iranian origin.

**Strengths** Reach and power.

**Weakness** Left a rider vulnerable as it required both hands to wield.

## 1 HEADING TO BATTLE

The army of the Eastern Roman Emperor, Valens, marches north almost 13 kilometres (eight miles) from Adrianople (Edirne) along the modern Tundzha River, approaching the position of the modern village of Murtaçali. There a vast wagon laager marks the Gothic position, its infantry drawn up inside.

## 2 NEGOTIATIONS OR PLAYING FOR TIME?

Drawn-out negotiations take place between representatives of the two commanders. The Gothic infantry begin to deploy in front of their wagon laager. The Romans, still partially strung out on the advance to Murtaçali, also begin to deploy. Their left wing of cavalry, consisting of approximately 2,500 men, is still on the road when battle commences. The negotiations suggest that the Goths are playing for time, perhaps awaiting a signal that their cavalry are in position and ready for battle.

## 3 ROMAN DEPLOYMENT

Heavy cavalry: *Scutarii*, *Equites Promoti*, *Sagittarii* horse archers, more cavalry each of 500 men; six units of *Legiones Palatinae*, each 800-men strong were present, but only two are named: the *Lancearii* and *Matiarii*. Approximately 12 units of *Auxilia Palatina* are present (each of 400 men), only one is named: the *Batavi*. Several of these units are foot archer units. Valens is in the centre. Five units of cavalry (500 men each) are still on the road on the Roman left.

## 4 GOTHIC DEPLOYMENT

Fritigern and his 10,000 Gothic infantry. Ammianus tells us later during the battle of hordes pouring forth, so additional infantry units must have been concealed within the laager. Gothic fires are set as signals or to cause discomfort to the Romans. On the left of the laager, Gothic cavalry assemble (unseen by the Romans) under the command of Alatheus and Saphrax, as well as a unit of Hunnic and Alan cavalry.

## 5 A GOTHIC TRICK?

The terrain on the Gothic left conceals the arrival and organisation of the Gothic cavalry. The smoke may also have been intended to mask their arrival. Alternatively, the smoke may have been a signal for the cavalry to charge or their signal that they were in position. They charged all at once, and the usual explanation that they were away foraging and arrived late to the battle will not suffice.



# ADRIANOPOLE

## Eastern Roman Empire

**LEGIONARIES** 4,800  
**AUXILIARIES** 4,800  
**HORSE ARCHERS** 2,500  
**HEAVY CAVALRY** 2,500



### VALENS LEADER

Valens became co-emperor of the Roman Empire with his brother, Valentinian I, in 364.

**Strengths** The might of the Eastern Roman Empire was at his disposal.

**Weakness** Distracted by the Persian campaign and jealous of the West, he may have wanted to win alone.



### BATAVI KEY UNIT

The Batavi were a legionary unit in the late Roman army. They stood their ground at Adrianople.

**Strengths** Heavily armed and protected and very well trained.

**Weakness** They were vulnerable on the flanks if unsupported.

### SPATHA KEY WEAPON

The spatha was a long, straight sword used by all forces, infantry and cavalry, in every army in the late Roman period.

**Strengths** Strong and versatile, it dominated design for centuries.

**Weakness** Unable to be wielded effectively in crowded formations.



### 10 THE END IS NIGH

Many of the surviving Romans begin to flee, with the enemy on their heels. Nightfall brings an end to the pursuit, especially since it is a moonless night. Valens flees with his men on foot and is either killed by an enemy arrow or, wounded, is taken to a two-storey farmhouse, which is burned by pillaging Goths.

### 9 VALENS' REFUGE

Valens takes refuge with two units of the *Legiones Palatinae*, the *Lancearii* and the *Matiarii*. Attempts to extricate Valens in the company of other units prove useless, as they have all fled the field.

### 8 THE GOTH'S POUR FORTH

More Gothic infantry pour forth from the wagon laager ("barbarians pouring forth in huge hordes"), putting the entire Roman line under pressure. They eventually break and flee. Several of the *Legiones Palatinae* units stand and die where they were positioned. The *Auxilia Palatina* units (including the Batavi) break and flee, as do Valens' guard unit, the *Armigeri defensores seniores* (although some individuals stayed with the emperor).

### 7 THE ROMANS ARE CROWDED TOGETHER

The Roman left wing reaches the wagons but is hard-pressed and, unsupported by cavalry, crowded together. In the centre and on the Roman right the Goths hold firm.

### 6 A SKIRMISH ESCALATES

As Richomeres, a Roman commander, prepares to cross to continue negotiations with the Goths, the *Scutarii* and *Sagittarii* on the Roman right engage with the Goths opposite them. The Gothic cavalry charge the Roman right flank, causing the *Scutarii* and *Sagittarii* to retreat. The Roman and Gothic infantry engage all along the line.



# ANCIENT BATTLES

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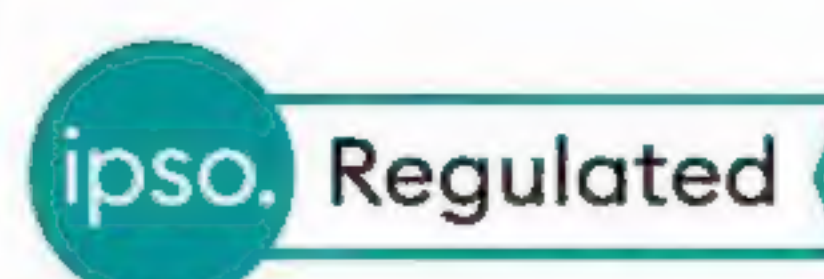
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